SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE CLASSICS

NO. 8 • FALL 1969 ICD 50c

A BIG NEW COLLECTION

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by Neil R. Jones

ROBOT AL 76 GOES ASTRAY
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WACKY WORLD
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STRANGE FLIGHT OF RICHARD CLAYTON
by Robert Bloch

THE ETERNAL WALL
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THE WORLD BEYOND
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THE RAT RACE
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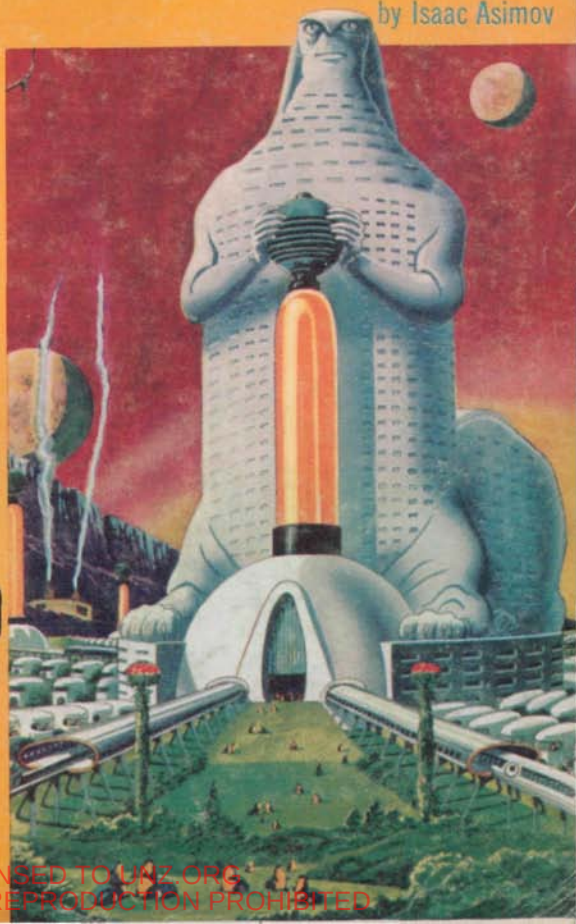

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A CITY ON JUPITER

The Story Of The Cover

By HENRY GADE

JUPITER? Sure, I've been there. Many times. Kirikee—that's the name of the capital city—is one of the oddest, yet most beautiful cities in all the solar system. I was there in 2148, on one of Clark's Tours. I was a great hand for traveling in those days; covered the whole system from Mercury to Pluto. But I'm getting old now, and a couple of gravities is a bit too much acceleration for my brittle bones.

Oh, Kirikee . . . pardon my rambling . . . Sure, she's a striking city. I remember the first time I saw her, from the forward port of the Tour ship. Kirikee, you see, is built on the floor of an immense extinct volcano, one of the hugest in the solar system. Jupiter's the biggest planet in the whole family, you know. Roughly 83,000 miles in diameter. Well, this crater's about thirty miles across, in the main cone—part of the famous Red Spot you hear so much about, although that's 5000 miles the long way.

The first thing I saw was the biggest building on the outer planets. But it wasn't built like any building I ever saw before. It was built just like one of the inhabitants of Jupiter. In fact, it's a statue of old Kirikee, the scientist who discovered the way to draw power, heat, and light from the interior of Jupiter. That's a necessity for life, you know, because Jupiter's a heck of a long way from the sun.

You'd think this building would have been an office building, but it isn't. It's dedicated entirely to apartments, and a great many of the people of Jupiter live in it. They almost worship Kirikee, and his memory is revered and honored everywhere.

He's pictured with his hands placed benevolently on the top of one of the energy-wells that draw heat, light, and power from down in Jupiter's depths. This energy well, which looks aboveground like a giant vacuum tube with a coil atop it, is the exact duplicate of dozens of overs all over the floor of the crater, each doing its part to make the city a comfortable place.

Well, when we landed at the spaceport, we debarked. I was anxious to see the city, and I stepped out before the signal was given. I almost broke my legs; went down like a poled ox. You see, it's necessary to wear gravity neutralizers there. An ordinary man like me weighs close to 600 pounds on Jupiter.

Well, they dragged me in, slapped a degravitator on me, and we went out again. I was a little shaky, but I soon broke away from the group to tour by myself. I like it better that way.

I guess I saw everything. They have smaller houses too, thousands of 'em. They look sort of modernistic, with wide glass fronts, and all alike. They radiate in long rows from the central building, with park-like areas of grass and trees between. There are no streets, as we know 'em, but the people go where they please on the level grass. They don't walk much, or rather, they don't crawl much (a Jupiterian hasn't any real legs, but built something like a slug that crawls on the rear half of its body). They prefer to ride in the elevated electric trains that scoot them all over the whole city at terrific speed. You have to ride in one, to appreciate that speed, because with such a terrific gravity, it really takes tremendous energy to propel 'em.

I took a train to one of the power-wells, and got off. They have power houses and factories grouped around each one, and those power houses sure are something. You can figure it out for yourself. A foot-pound of energy is a lot more energy on Jupiter than it is on Earth. Anyway that machinery is tremendous, and you wonder how the slug-like people of Jupiter ever built it, or even how they had the ambition to build it. I guess if it hadn't been for Kirikee, they never would have, either.

When I left the factories, I went to the big building built in Kirikee's image. It's a colossal thing. About three hundred feet high, and one hundred feet wide by three hundred long.

They don't have stairways on Jupiter. It's too hard to lift a leg up a stair, and besides, Jupiterians haven't much in the way of legs. You go up a ramp, into each building, and inside, there are long circular ramps.

But I took one of the elevators, because I wanted to see the city from the tower, or the head, of Kirikee. Those elevators start slow, but man, do they stop fast! Gravity sure puts in its oar on that world!

All apartments, that building, and mostly artificial lighting. Outside rooms have windows, but then, outside light isn't great, because the sun's so far away. I reached the top finally, and found a window in the eye. Jupiter's capital city is some sight from there! There's color on Jupiter! The sky's brilliant red, from the reflection of the red spot, and the crater walls are purple. I'll remember it all my life. You ought to go see it sometime. It's worth the trip.

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A GREAT NEW COLLECTION

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cover painting by Frank R. Paul
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ROBOT AL 76 GOES ASTRAY

By ISAAC ASIMOV

AL 76 was built for a single and specific purpose. Unfortunately, he went and got himself lost. But he knew his job and he did it!

JONATHAN QUELL'S eyes crinkled worriedly behind their rimless glasses as he charged through the door labelled "General Manager."

He slapped the folded paper in his hands upon the desk and panted, "Look at that, boss!"

Sam Tobe juggled the cigar in his mouth from one cheek to the other, and looked. His hand went to his unshaven jaw and rasped along it. "Hell!" he exploded. "What are they talking about?"

"They say we sent out five AL robots," Quell explained, quite unnecessarily.

"We sent six," said Tobe.

"Sure, six! But they only got

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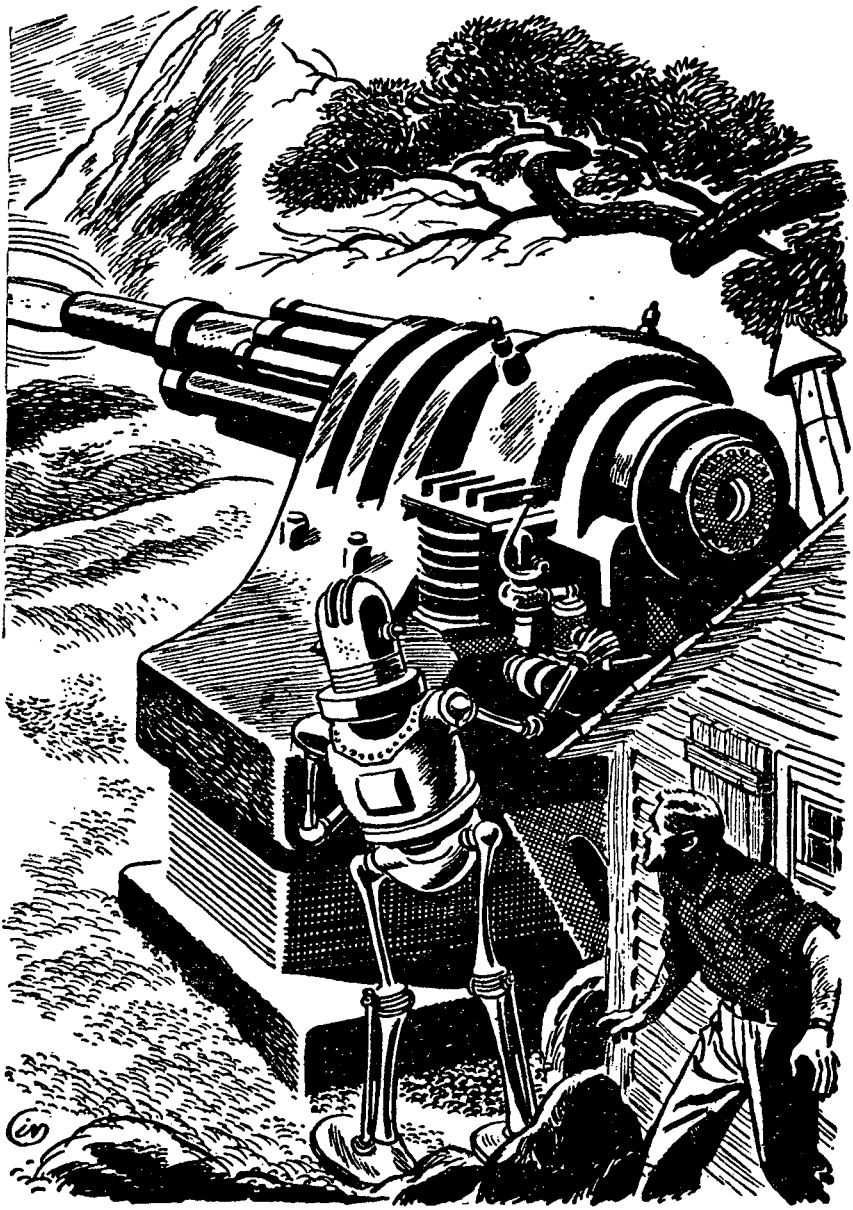

The mountain top vanished in a blaze straight from Hell!

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five at the other end. They sent out the serial numbers and AL 76 is missing."

Tobe's chair went over backwards as he heaved his thick bulk upright and went through the door as if he were on greased wheels. It was five hours later—with the plant all pulled apart from assembly rooms to vacuum chambers; with every one of the plants two hundred employees put through the third-degree mills; that a sweating, disheveled Tobe sent an emergency message to the Central Plant at Schenectady.

And at the Central Plant, a sudden explosion of near-panic took place. For the first time in the history of the United States Robot and Mechanical Men Corporation, a robot had escaped to the outer world. It wasn't so much that the law forbade the presence of any robot on Earth outside a licensed factory of the Corporation. Laws could always be squared. What was much more to the point was the statement made by one of the research mathematicians.

He said: "That one robot was created to run a Disinto on the Moon. Its positronic brain was equipped for a Lunar environment, and *only* a Lunar environment. On Earth here it's going to receive seventy-five umptyillion sense-impressions for which it was never prepared. There's no telling *what* its reactions will be. No telling! And he wiped a forehead that had suddenly gone wet, with the back of his hand.

Within the hour, a stratoplane had left for the Virginia plant. The instructions were simple.

"Get that robot, and get it fast!"

AL 76 was confused! In fact, confusion was the only impression his delicate positronic brain retained. It had started when he had found himself in these strange surroundings. How it had come about, he no longer knew. Everything was mixed up.

There was green underfoot, and brown shafts rose all about him with more green on top. And the sky was blue where it should have been black. The sun was all right, round and yellow and hot—but where was the powdery pumice rock underfoot; where were the huge cliff-like crater rings?

There was only the green below and the blue above. The sounds that surrounded him were all strange. He had passed through running water that had reached his waist. It was blue and cold and wet. And when he passed people, as he did, occasionally, they were without the spacesuits they should have been wearing. When they saw him, they shouted and ran.

One man had leveled a gun at him and the bullet had whistled past his head—and then he had run, too.

He had no idea of how long he had been wandering before he finally stumbled upon Randolph Payne's shack two miles out in the woods from the town

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of Hannaford. Randolph Payne himself, a screwdriver in one hand, a pipe in the other and a battered ruin of a vacuum-cleaner between his knees, squatted outside the doorway.

Payne was humming at the time, for he was a naturally happy-go-lucky soul—when at his shack. He had a more respectable dwelling place back in Hannaford, but *that* dwelling place was pretty largely occupied by his wife, a fact which he silently but sincerely regretted. Perhaps, then, there was a sense of relief and freedom at such times when he found himself able to retire to his "special deluxe doghouse" where he could smoke in peace and attend to his hobby of re-servicing household appliances.

It wasn't much of a hobby, but sometimes someone would bring out a radio or an alarm clock and the money he would get paid for juggling its insides was the only money he ever got that didn't pass in driblets through his spouse's niggardly hands.

This vacuum cleaner for instance, would bring in an easy six bits.

At the thought, he broke into song, raised his eyes, and broke into a sweat. The song choked off, the eyes popped, and the sweat became more intense. He tried to stand up—as a preliminary to running like hell—but he couldn't get his legs to cooperate.

And then AL 76 had squatted down next to him, and said, "Say, why did all the rest of them run?"

Payne knew damn well why they all ran, but the gurgle that issued from his diaphragm didn't show it. He tried to inch away from the robot.

AL 76 continued in an aggrieved tone, "One of them even took a shot at me. An inch to the left and he would have scratched my chest plates."

"M-must have b-been a nut," stammered Payne.

"That's possible." The robot's voice grew more confidential, "Listen, what's wrong with everything?"

Payne looked hurriedly about. It had struck him that the robot spoke in a remarkably mild tone for one so heavily and brutally metallic in appearance. It also struck him that he had heard somewheres that robots were mentally incapable of harming human beings. He relaxed a bit.

"There's nothing wrong with anything."

"Isn't there?" AL 76 eyed him accusingly. "*You're* all wrong. Where's your spacesuit?"

"I haven't got any."

"Then why aren't you dead?"

That stopped Payne, "Well,—I don't know."

"See!" said the robot, triumphantly, "there is something wrong with everything. Where's Mt. Copernicus? Where's Lunar Station 17? And where's my Disinto? I want to get to work, I do." He seemed perturbed, and his voice shook as he continued.

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"I've been going about for hours trying to get someone to tell me where my Disinto is, but they all run away. By now, I'm probably way behind schedule and the Sectional Executive will be as sore as blazes. This is a fine situation."

Slowly, Payne unscrambled the stew in which his brain found itself and said, "Listen, what do they call you?"

"My serial number is AL 76."

"All right. Al is good enough for me. Now, Al, if you're looking for Lunar Station 17, that's on the Moon. See?"

AL 76 nodded his head ponderously, "Sure. But I've been looking for it—"

"But it's on the Moon. This isn't the Moon."

It was was the robot's turn to become confused. He watched Payne for a speculative moment and then said slowly, "What do you mean this isn't the Moon? Of course it's the Moon. Because if it isn't the Moon, what is it? Huh? Answer me that."

Payne made a funny sound in his throat and breathed hard. He pointed a finger at the robot and shook it. "Look," he said,—and then the brilliant idea of the century struck him, and he finished with a strangled, "Wow!"

AL 76 eyed him censoriously, "That isn't an answer. I think I have a right to a civil answer if I ask a civil question."

Payne wasn't listening. He was still marvelling at himself. Why, it was as plain as day. This robot was one built for the Moon that had somehow gotten loose on Earth. Naturally it would be all mixed up, because its positronic brain had been geared exclusively for a Lunar environment, making its Earthly surroundings entirely without any meaning.

And now if he could only keep the robot here—until he could get in touch with the men at the factory in Petersboro. Why, robots were worth money. The cheapest cost $50,000, he had once heard, and some of them ran into millions. Think of the reward!

Man, oh, man, *think of the reward!* And every cent for himself. Not as much as a quarter of a snifter of a plugged nickel for Mirandy. Jumpin' tootin' blazes, *no!*

He rose to his feet at last, "Al," he said. "You and I are buddies! Pals! I love you like a brother." He thrust out a hand, "Shake!"

The robot swallowed up the offered hand in a metal paw and squeezed it gently. He didn't quite understand, "Does that mean you'll tell me how to get to Lunar Station 17."

Payne was a trifle disconcerted, "N—no, not exactly. As a matter of fact, I like you so much, I want you to stay here with me a while."

"Oh, no, I can't do that. I've got to get to work." He added gloomily, "How would you like to be falling behind your quota hour by hour and minute by

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minute? I want to work. I've *got* to work."

Payne thought sourly that there was no accounting for tastes, and said, "All right, then I'll explain something to you—because I can see from the looks of you that you're an intelligent person. I've had orders from your Sectional Executive, and he wants me to keep you here for a while. Till he sends for you, in fact."

"What for?" asked AL 76, suspiciously.

"I can't say. It's secret government stuff." Payne prayed inwardly and fervently, that the robot would swallow this. Some robots were damned clever, he knew, but this looked like one of the early models.

While he prayed, AL 76 considered. The robot's brain, adjusted to the handling of a Disinto on the Moon, was not at its best when engaged in abstract thought, but, just the same, ever since he had gotten lost, AL 76 had found his thought processes becoming stranger. The alien surroundings did something to him.

His next remark was almost shrewd. He said, slyly, "What's my Sectional Executive's name?"

Payne gulped and thought rapidly. "Al," he said, in a pained fashion, "you hurt me with this suspicion. I *can't* tell you his name. The trees have ears."

AL 76 inspected the tree next to him stolidly and said, "They have not."

"I know. What I mean is that spies are all around."

"Spies?"

"Yes. You know, *bad* people that want to destroy Lunar Station 17."

"What for?"

"Because they're *bad*. And they want to destroy *you*, and that's why you've got to stay here for a while, so they can't find you."

"But—but I've got to have a Disinto. I mustn't fall behind my quota."

"You will have. Oh, you will have." Payne promised earnestly, and just as earnestly damned the robot's one-track mind. "They're going to send one out tomorrow. Yeah, tomorrow." That would be plenty of time to get the men from the factory out here and collect beautiful heaps of hundred-dollar bills.

But AL 76 grew only the more stubborn under the distressing impingement of the strange world all about him upon his thinking mechanism.

"No," he said. "I've got to have a Disinto now." Stiffly, he straightened his joints, jerking erect. "I'd better look for it some more."

Payne swarmed after and grabbed a cold, hard elbow. "Listen," he squealed. "You've got to stay—"

And something in the robot's mind clicked. All the strangeness surrounding him collected itself into one globule, exploded, and left his brain ticking with a curiously increased efficiency. He

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whirled on Payne, "I tell you what. I can build a Disinto right here. —And then I can work it."

Payne paused doubtfully, "I don't think I can build one." He wondered if it do any good to pretend he could.

"That's all right." AL 76 could almost feel the positronic paths of his brain weaving into a new pattern, and he experienced a strange exhilation, "*I* can build one." He looked into Payne's deluxe doghouse, and said, "You've got all the material here that I need."

Randolph Payne surveyed the junk with which his shack was filled: eviscerated radios, a topless refrigerator, rusty automobile engines, a broken-down gas range, several miles of frayed wire, and, taking it all together, fifty tons or thereabouts of the most heterogeneous mass of old metal as ever caused a junkman to sniff disdainfully.

"Have I?" he said, weakly.

Two hours later, two things happened practically simultaneously. The first was that Sam Tobe of the Petersboro branch of U.S. Robot & Mechanical Men, Inc. received a visiphone call from one Randolph Payne of Hannaford. It concerned the missing robot, and Tobe, with a deep-throated snarl, broke connection half-way through, and ordered all subsequent calls to be re-routed to the sixth assistant vice-president in charge of buttonholes.

This was not really unreasonable in Tobe. During the past week, although Robot AL 76 had dropped from sight completely, reports had flooded in from all over the Union as to the robot's whereabouts. As many as fourteen a day came—usually from fourteen different states.

Tobe was damn tired of it, to say nothing of being half-crazy just on general principles. There was even talk of a Congressional investigation, though every reputable Roboticist and Mathematical Physicist on Earth swore the robot was harmless.

In his state of mind, then, it is not surprising that it took three hours for the General Manager to pause and consider just exactly how it was that this Randolph Payne had known that the robot was slated for Lunar Station 17; and, for that matter, how he had known that the robot's serial number was AL 76. Those details had not been given out by the company.

He kept on considering for about a minute and a half and then swung into action.

However, during these three hours between the call and the action, the second event took place. Randolph Payne, having correctly diagnosed the abrupt break in his call as being due to general skepticism on the part of the plant official, returned to his shack with a camera. They couldn't very well argue with a photograph, and he'd be damned if he'd show them the real thing before they came across with the cash.

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AL 76 was busy with affairs of his own. Half of the contents of Payne's shack was littered over about two acres of ground and, in the middle of it, the robot squatted and fooled around with radio tubes, hunks of iron, copper wire, and general junk. He paid no attention to Payne, who, sprawling flat on his belly, focussed his camera for a beautiful shot.

And at this point it was that Lemuel Oliver Cooper turned the bend in the road and froze in his tracks as he took in the tableau. The reason for his coming in the first place was an ailing electric toaster that had developed the annoying habit of throwing out pieces of bread forcefully, but thoroughly untoasted. The reason for his *leaving* was more obvious. He had come with a slow, mildly cheerful, spring-morning saunter. He left with a speed that would have caused any college track coach to raise his eyebrows and purse his lips approvingly.

There was no appreciable slackening of speed, until Cooper hurtled into Sheriff Saunders' office minus hat and toaster and brought himself up hard against the wall.

Kindly hands lifted him and for half a minute he tried speaking before he had actually calmed down to the point of breathing, with, of course, no result.

They gave him whiskey, and fanned him, and when he did speak, it came out something like this: "—M-monster—seven feet tall—shack all busted up—poor Rannie Payne—" and so on.

They got the story out of him gradually: how there was a huge metal monster, seven feet tall, maybe even eight or nine, out at Randolph Payne's shack; how Randolph Payne himself was on his stomach, a "poor, bleeding, mangled corpse"; how the monster was then busily engaged in wrecking the shack out of sheer destructiveness; then how it had turned on Lemuel Oliver Cooper, and how he—Cooper—had made his escape by half a hair.

Sheriff Saunders hitched his belt tighter about his portly middle and said, "It's that there machine man that got away from the Petersboro factory. We got warning on it last Saturday.—Hey, Jake, you get every man in Hannaford County that can shoot and slap a depitty's badge on him. Get them here at noon. And listen, Jake, before you do that, just drop in at the Widder Payne's place and slip her the bad news gentle-like."

It is reported that Miranda Payne, having been acquainted with events, paused only to make sure that her "ex"-husband's insurance policy was safe, and to make a few pithy remarks concerning his danged foolishness in not taking out double what he had, before breaking out into as prolonged and heart-wringing a wail of grief as ever became a respectable widow.

It was some hours later that

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Randolph Payne—unaware of his horrible mutilation and death—viewed the completed negatives of his snapshots with satisfaction. As a series of portraits of a robot at work, they left nothing to the imagination. They might have been labelled: "Robot Gazing Thoughtfully at a Vacuum Tube," "Robot Splicing Two Wires," "Robot Wielding Screw-Driver," "Robot Taking Frigidaire apart with Great Violence" and so on.

As there now remained only the routine of making the prints themselves, he stepped out from beyond the curtain of the improvised dark-room for a bit of a smoke and a chat with AL 76.

In doing so, he was blissfully unaware that the neighboring woods were verminous with nervous farmers armed with anything from an old colonial relic of a blunderbuss to the portable machine-gun carried by the Sheriff himself. Nor, for that matter, had he any inkling of the fact that half a dozen roboticists, under the leadership of Sam Tobe, were smoking down the highway from Petersboro at better than a hundred and twenty miles an hour—for the sole purpose of having the pleasure and honor of his acquaintance.

So while things were jittering towards a climax, Randolph Payne sighed with self-satisfaction, lit a match upon the seat of his pants, puffed away at his pipe, and looked at AL 76 with amusement.

It had been apparent for quite some time that the robot was more than slightly lunatic. Randolph Payne was himself an expert at home-made contraptions; having built several that could not have been exposed to daylight without searing the eyeballs of all beholders;—but he had never even conceived of anything approaching the monstrosity that AL 76 was concocting.

It would have made the Rube Goldbergs of his day die in convulsions of envy. It would have made Picasso quit art in the sheer knowledge that he had been hopelessly surpassed. It would have soured the milk in the udders of any cow within half a mile of it.

In fact, it was gruesome!

From a rusty and massive iron base that faintly resembled something Payne had once seen attached to a second-hand tractor, it rose upward in rakish, drunken swerves, through a bewildering mess of wires, wheels, tubes, and nameless horrors without number, ending in a megaphone arrangement that looked decidedly sinister.

Payne had the impulse to peek in the megaphone, but refrained. He had seen far more sensible machines explode suddenly and with violence.

He said, "Hey, Al."

The robot looked up. He had been lying flat on his stomach, teasing a thin sliver of metal into place. "What do you want, Payne?"

"What is this?" He asked it in the tone of one referring to

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something foul and decomposing, held gingerly between two ten-foot poles.

"It's the Disinto I'm making—so I can start to work. It's an improvement on the standard model." The robot rose, dusted his knees clankingly, and looked at it proudly.

Payne shuddered, an "improvement"! ! No wonder they hid the original in caverns on the Moon. Poor satellite! Poor, dead satellite! He had always so wanted to know what a fate worse than death was. Now he knew.

"Will it work?" he asked.

"Sure."

"How do you know?"

"It's got to. I made it, didn't I? I only need one thing now. Got a flashlight?"

"Somewheres, I guess." Payne vanished into the shack and returned almost immediately.

The robot unscrewed the bottom and set to work. In five minutes, he had finished, stepped back, and said, "All set. Now I get to work. You may watch if you want to."

A pause, while Payne tried to appreciate the magnanimity of the offer. "Is it safe?"

"A baby could handle it."

"Oh!" Payne grinned weakly and got behind the thickest tree in the vicinity. "Go ahead," he said, "I have the utmost confidence in you."

AL 76 pointed to the nightmarish junkpile and then said, "Watch!" His hands set quickly to work—

The embattled farmers of Hannaford County, Virginia, weaved up upon Payne's shack in a slowly tightening circle. With the blood of their heroic colonial forebears pounding in their veins—the goose-flesh trickling up and down their spines—they crept from tree to tree.

Sheriff Saunders spread the word, "Fire when I give the signal—and aim at the eyes."

Jacob Linker—Lank Jake, to his friends, and Sheriff's Deputy to himself—edged close, "Ya think mebbe this machine man has skedaddled." He did not quite manage to suppress the tone of wistful hopefulness in his voice.

"Dunno," grunted the Sheriff. "Guess not, though. We woulda come across him in the woods if he had, and we haven't."

"But it's awful quiet, and it 'pears to me as if we're gettin' close to Payne's place."

The remainder wasn't necessary. Sheriff Saunders had a lump in his throat so big it had to be swallowed in three installments. "Get back," he ordered, "and keep your finger on the trigger."

They were at the rim of the clearing now, and Sheriff Saunders closed his eyes and stuck the corner of one out from behind the tree. Seeing nothing, he paused, then tried again, eyes open this time.

Results were, naturally, better.

To be exact, he saw one huge machine man, back towards him,

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bending over one soul-curdling, hiccupy contraption of uncertain origin and less certain purpose. The only item he missed was the quivering figure of Randolph Payne, embracing the tree next but three to the nor'-nor'-west.

Sheriff Saunders stepped out into the open and raised his machine-gun. The robot, still presenting a broad metal back, said in a loud voice—to person or persons unknown — "Watch!" and as the Sheriff opened his mouth to ki-yi a general order to fire—metal fingers compressed a switch.

There exists no adequate description of what occurred afterwards, in spite of the presence of seventy eye-witnesses. In the days, months, and years to come not one of those seventy ever had a word to say about the few seconds after the Sheriff had opened his mouth to give the firing order. When they were questioned about it, they merely turned apple-green and staggered away.

It is plain, however, that in a general way, what did occur was this.

Sheriff Saunders opened his mouth; AL 76 pulled a switch; the Disinto worked—and seventy-five trees, two barns, three cows and the top three-quarters of Duckbill Mountain whiffed into rarefied atmosphere. They became, so to speak, one with the snows of yesteryear.

Sheriff Saunders' mouth remained open for an indefinite interval thereafter, but nothing—neither firing orders nor anything else—issued therefrom. And then—

And then, there was a stirring in the air, a multiple ro-o-o-o-shing sound, a series of purple streaks through the atmosphere radiating away from Randolph Payne's shack at the center—and of the members of the posse, not a sign.

There were various guns scattered about the vicinity, including the Sheriff's patented nickel - plated, extra - rapid-fire, guaranteed-no-clog, portable machine gun. There were about fifty hats, a few half-chomped cigars, and some odds and ends that had come loose in the excitement—but of actual human beings there were none.

Except for Lank Jake, not one of those human beings came within human ken for three days, and the exception in his favor came about because he was interrupted in his comet-flight by the half-dozen men from the Petersboro factory, who were charging *into* the wood at a pretty fair speed of their own.

It was Sam Tobe that stopped him, catching Lank Jake's head skillfully in the pit of his stomach. When he caught his breath, Tobe asked, "Where's Randolph Payne's place?"

Lank Jake allowed his eyes to unglaze for just a moment. "Brother," he said, "just you follow the direction I ain't going."

And with that, miraculously,

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he was gone. There was only a shrinking dot, dodging trees on the horizon, that might have been him, but now Sam Tobe wouldn't have sworn to it.

That takes care of the posse; but there still remains Randolph Payne, whose own reactions took something of a different form.

For Randolph Payne, the five-second interval after the pulling of the switch and the disappearance of Duckbill Mountain was a total blank. At the start he had been peering through the thick underbrush from behind the bottom of the trees; at the end, he was swinging wildly from one of the topmost branches. The same impulse that had driven the posse horizontally, had driven him vertically.

As to how he had covered the hundred fifty feet from roots to top—whether he had climbed, or jumped, or flown, he did not know—and he didn't give a particle of a damn.

What he *did* know was that property had been destroyed by a robot temporarily in his possession. All visions of rewards vanished and were replaced by trembling nightmares of hostile citizenry, shrieking lynch mobs, lawsuits, murder charges and what Mirandy Payne would say. —Mostly what Mirandy Payne would say.

He was yelling wildly and hoarsely, "Hey, you robot, you smash that thing, do you hear? Smash it good! You forget I ever had anything to do with it. You're a stranger to me, see? You don't ever say a word about it. Forget it, you hear?"

He didn't expect his orders to do any good; it was only reflex action. What he didn't know was that a robot always obeyed a human order except where carrying it out involved danger to another human.

AL 76, therefore calmly and methodically, proceeded to demolish his Disinto into rubble and flinders.

Just as he was stamping the last cubic inch underfoot, Sam Tobe and his contingent arrived, and Randolph Payne, sensing that the real owners of the robot had come, dropped out of the tree head-first and made for regions unknown feet-first.

He did not wait for his reward.

Austin Wilde, Robotical Engineer, turned to Sam Tobe and said, "Did you get anything out of the robot?"

Tobe shook his head and he snarled deep in his throat, "Nothing. Not a damn thing. He's forgotten everything that's happened since he left the factory. He must have gotten *orders* to forget or it couldn't have left him so blank. —What was that pile of junk?"

"Just that. A pile of junk.—But it must have been a Disinto before he smashed it, and I'd like to kill the fellow who ordered him to do that, by slow torture. Look at this!"

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"Look at 'em!" gasped Lester. "It's a nightmare!"

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WACKY WORLD

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Lester and Hoskins crossed the void and landed on the bleak and forbidding surface of the planet Mars. But they found no welcome; rather, an incredibly and nightmarish population bent only upon—revenge!

THE dull red planet was expanding across the heavens with frightening speed. The rocket fell toward it with its snouted prow spewing fire to check its fall. Shrill scream of splitting air came to the two men inside the craft.

Young Brett Lester felt a climbing nausea as he was flung forward against the recoil straps. He gulped and choked and tried to look downward at the surface of Mars. He saw a flat red plain with a sprawling black blotch in the north.

Hoskins, who held the pilot chair, was fighting hard to keep the rocket from spinning as it fell. His square, competent face was a strained brown mask as his stubby fingers jabbed the firing buttons. There was a final blast of rockets that shook Lester's brain, a jarring, tumbling thump, and then numb silence.

They were on Mars. Lester knew it, and awe possessed him. For the first time, men had left Earth and crossed to a neighbor planet. He struggled for words with which to epitomize this historic moment.

But Hoskins spoke first. The older engineer was tenderly fingering his thigh, and an expression of great joy spread across his face.

"I think my boil just broke," he said.

Amazing Stories, March 1942

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Lester felt dashed and disgusted. "Your boil!" he cried. "Here we are, the first men ever to land on Mars, and what's the first thing we start talking about? Your boil!"

Hoskins stared. "That boil's been devilling me for weeks. You try sitting on a boil, and see how you like it."

"All right, all right, let's forget about your boil!" Lester cried, his lean young face excited. "We're on Mars, man—can't you get that through your thick, unimaginative skull?"

Hoskins stared out the window. Through the thick quartz glass could be seen nothing but a desert of drifting red sand, marching dunes and ridges that cut off their vision a few hundred feet away.

"Yeah, we made it," said Hoskins abstractedly. "Now if we just get back safely, we'll have added a lot of data to rocket mechanics science."

"Is rocket mechanics all you can think of?" demanded Lester. "Here's a whole unknown world in front of us."

Hoskins shrugged his square shoulders. "It's not unknown. We know from the astronomers just what Mars must be like—an arid globe with hardly any oxygen, no water, and very cold."

"But we don't know what kind of living creatures may exist here!" Lester cried with youthful enthusiasm.

Hoskins uttered a grunt. "You must have been reading those wild pseudo-scientific stories they publish by the hundreds these days—all about bug-eyed red Martians and horrible monsters and so on."

Lester flushed. "Well, I used to read a lot of the stories. As a matter of fact, that's what got me interested in rocket engineering."

The older engineer jeered. "I thought so. Well, you can forget your bug-eyed Martians and all that. You ought to know this world's too cold and has too little atmosphere to support any animal life."

"I know," Lester admitted, "but I was sort of hoping we might find—"

"Forget it," Hoskins advised. "There's nothing here except maybe a few lichens."

"But can't we go out now?" Lester pressed eagerly. "I'd just like to see."

The older engineer shrugged. All right. We'll need those felt suits and oxygen helmets, of course. I'd better run an air test first."

He busied himself with the air tester. Young Lester continued to peer eagerly out at the crimson desert. It, at least, looked exactly as he had expected—a somber expanse of red sand, not greatly unlike an Earth desert except for the hue. Twisting little sand-devils whisked to and fro, and over all fell the brassy light of the shrunken Sun.

He turned as Hoskins made a bewildered sound. "I can't understand this! The tester shows air

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almost as dense and warm and oxygenated as the air of Earth!"

Even Lester knew that was impossible. "You made an error. Let me try it."

He got the same result. The air outside, declared the instrument, was only a little cooler than Earth's and possessed as much oxygen.

"It's crazy!" blurted Hoskins, wide-eyed. "The conditions here must have thrown the tester out of gear. No, that can't be—"

"Let's open the door and find out," Lester suggested.

They finally tried unscrewing the door a trifle, standing ready to shut it instantly if the air outside proved unbreathable. But to their increased amazement, the tester had not lied. The air that came into the opening was fairly warm, and seemed exactly like Earth air to their lungs.

They opened the door wide and stepped out of the rocket onto the red sand. It was like a pleasant October afternoon. The brassy sun shone benignly upon them, and the cool wind caressed their faces.

"Holy cats, the astronomers have been all wrong!" Hoskins exclaimed. "But it's still all insane. How can a little planet like Mars hold an atmosphere like this, and how can it be so warm?"

They took a few experimental steps. They found that they felt somewhat lighter and that their steps had a floating quality, but that they could move quite easily. But the warmth and oxygen continued to mystify them.

"I swear it's all beyond me," Hoskins was muttering. "By all the laws of astronomy and physics, Mars shouldn't be like this."

Lester's eyes lightened. "If there's warmth and air and water vapor like this, there may be living creatures here after all!"

Hoskins snorted. "Your bug-eyed red Martians of the stories, eh? I wish you'd forget that foolishness."

"I still think there might be some kind of animal life," Lester defended. He added, "As we were landing, I saw a big black blotch in the north. What could that be?"

"Probably an outcrop of dark rock in the desert," Hoskins ventured. "We might be able to see from the crest of that next ridge."

They trudged up the red slope, their feet slipping in the sand. Both men felt numb with bewilderment still at the unexpected earthliness of conditions.

They reached the crest of the sandy ridge. From here, they could see miles north across the desert toward the looming black mass. But neither man looked toward it. Their attention was riveted by four figures who had been walking across the sands nearby, and who had stopped and then turned toward the Earthmen.

The four figures were men. But they were not like the

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Earthmen. They had bright red skins, hairless, domed skulls, bulging chests and stilt-like limbs. They wore a complicated harness of belts, from which hung at each man's waist a gleaming metal tube.

Their faces were much like Earthmen's faces, though they were red-skinned and solemnly cadaverous in expressions. But their eyes were different. Their eyes were bulging and faceted, like the eyes of insects. Eyes out of a nightmare!

"I'm delirious!" wailed Hoskins. "It must have been the shock. I can see four bug-eyed red men coming toward us!"

"I can see them too!" gulped young Lester. "But they can't be real—"

He stopped. The four bug-eyed red Martians had strolled to within a few feet and now stood eyeing the Earthmen. One of the four spoke.

"Hello, strangers!" the Martian hailed them in perfect English. "Going back to the City?"

Hoskins looked at Lester. Lester looked at Hoskins. Then the older engineer laughed lightly.

"It just shows how easily shock can foster delusions," he told the younger man. "Pinch me, Brett."

Lester reached and pinched. The older man uttered a howl of pain. "You didn't need to pinch my boil!"

They suddenly fell silent as they realized that the four bug-eyed red Martians were still there, facing them in an impatient way.

"What's the matter with you fellows?" demanded the foremost Martian impatiently. "Are you crazy or something?"

"He does exist and he does speak English," Hoskins articulated with difficulty. "You see and hear him, don't you?"

"Yes," swallowed Lester shakily. "I see and hear him but I still don't believe it."

"Let me introduce myself, boys," the foremost Martian was saying. "I'm Ard Vark. What's your names?"

They told him, and his bulging, faceted eyes brightened as he bowed to them.

Then Ard Vark motioned to his three fellow Martians. "My friends here are Ok Vok, Zing Zau and Moo Koo."

"How in the world can you keep their names straight?" Lester asked, speaking the first thing that came into his whirling mind.

Ard Vark's red face darkened. "We have a tough time with our names, I've got to admit. Why the devil couldn't we have been called by something sensible?"

Neither Lester nor Hoskins had any answer to that. Ard Vark was continuing in a genial manner. "You fellows look new. When'd you get here?"

"Just—just a little while ago," Lester answered unsteadily.

"I thought so," remarked Ard Vark. "Haven't seen anybody just like you two around here

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before. Well, let's get back to the City."

Hoskins and Lester stared. It *was* a city, that sprawling black mass in the north. From this distance it appeared to be an heterogeneous jumble of fantastically varied architectures, with all kinds of towers, domes and minarets standing out against the brassy sky.

The two Earthmen were so numbed by shock that it took them a few minutes to realize that they were strolling with Ard Vark and the other red Martians toward the distant city.

"This," Hoskins muttered thickly to Lester, "is too much. First, bug-eyed Martians like in those crazy stories. Now a city—"

"You don't suppose we were killed when the rocket landed and that we're in some kind of after-life?" Lester asked wildly.

Hoskins grunted. "This doesn't look like any afterworld to me. Besides, my boil wouldn't be hurting me yet if I was dead."

One of the Martians—it might have been Ok Vok or Moo Koo—yelled and pointed west across the desert. A creature like something out of a bad dream was galloping toward them.

It was a scaled green monster of elphantine bulk, and looked like a cross between a dragon and a crocodile. It came toward them on ten short legs, its enormous jaws gaping to show great white fangs.

Ard Vark whipped out the metal tube at his belt and levelled it at the monster. A brilliant white ray lanced from the tube and hit the creature. The green monster recoiled, and then fled away.

"What—what was that?" quavered Hoskins.

"A *whulp*," grunted Ard Vark, holstering the metal ray-tube. "They're damned pests."

"What kind of a ray was that you turned on him?" Lester asked eagerly.

"Well, it's *supposed* to be a disintegrating ray," Ard Vark said. "As a matter of fact, it won't disintegrate anything. It's just a harmless beam of light, but the *whulps* are scared of it."

Hoskins stared at him. "But if it's supposed to be a disintegrating ray, why won't it work?"

Ard Vark snorted. "Because the fellow who thought it up didn't know anything about science. How can a fellow who doesn't know any science devise a disintegrator?"

Ok Vok, beside him, nodded in corroboration. "That's right. We use these rays for flashlights—that's all they're good for."

Lester looked at Hoskins, and the older engineer returned the look. By this time they were near the fantastic city, and Ard Vark pointed to a great landing-field near it.

It was obviously a space-port. Upon its smooth tarmac rested hundreds of space-ships of different designs. Some were cylindrical and others were arrow-

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shaped, torpedo-shaped or disk-shaped. All the ships were mightily impressive in appearance. But Ard Vark sneered at them.

"That's another example of it," he snorted. "We've got all those space-ships and not one of 'em will fly an inch, for the fellows who thought 'em up didn't know enough science to make 'em workable."

"My name is Wilson Hoskins," intoned Hoskins fervently. "I'm thirty-five years old and I can multiply twelve by twelve. I'm *not* crazy—"

"Ah, here we are back in the City," interrupted Ard Vark. "Where are you fellows heading for?"

"We—we just want to look around," stammered Lester.

The Martian metropolis was a truly astounding sight. It consisted of some scores of good-sized cities, each with its own style of architecture, all crowded together side by side.

The section they had entered was one of crumbling buildings of black stone, squat and massive and very ancient looking. Beyond that, Lester could glimpse a section of beautiful transparent domes surrounded by gardens. Next to that was a section of shining, hexagonal chromium towers, and a further section of tall copper conical structures, and a still further section of buildings that looked like silver cylinders set on end.

More bewildering than this fantastic multiplicity of outlandish architectures was the motley character of the crowd in the streets. For there was a big crowd. But only a fraction of it consisted of bug-eyed red men like Ard Vark and his companions. The others made up scores of different races, each grotesquely different from the others in size, shape and color.

Lester's stunned eyes beheld Martians who looked like little pink midgets without arms; great green Martians who towered twenty feet high and had six arms; Martians who had four eyes, and others with three eyes, and others who had no eyes at all but had feelers protruding from their faces; blue Martians, and black Martians, and yellow Martians, and violet Martians, not to speak of a few in varying shades of magenta, cerise and puce.

This amazing crowd wore garments that ranged from a simple harness of belts such as the bug-eyed red men wore, to silken trappings blazing with jewels. Many of them carried swords or daggers, but most of them appeared to be equipped with ray-tubes or ray-guns.

Most surprising of all, the women of the crowd were without exception far more attractive than the men. In fact, Brett Lester perceived that every Martian girl in the throng, be she brown, green, blue or red, was by Earth standards a ravishing beauty.

Hoskins was gasping. "Where did they all come from?"

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Ard Vark stared at him. "What do you mean? They came the same way we all did."

"I don't understand," gulped Hoskins. "I don't understand anything here. And I don't want to. All I want is to get back to Earth. Come on, Lester."

He grabbed Lester's hand. But Ard Vark intervened. The tall bug-eyed red man was staring at them with sudden suspicion.

"Let's get this straight," rasped Ard Vark. "Do you mean to say that you two weren't created here like the rest of us—that you came here from *Earth?*"

"Why, of course," cried Lester. With eager pride, he explained. "We were too stunned to tell you before. But we're the first Earthmen ever to visit this planet."

"Earthmen?" cried Ard Vark. His eyes blazed and his voice rose to a roar. *"Earthmen?"*

A sudden hush fell over the chattering, fantastic throng in the streets. Green, red, blue and yellow Martians crowded in sudden fierce excitement around the two explorers.

"You're sure—you're quite sure, that you two are Earthmen?" asked Ard Vark with desperate eagerness.

"Of course we are," announced Lester proudly. He saw a chance at last to speak historic words. "Friends of Mars," he began, "upon this unprecedent occasion—"

"They're Earthmen—get them, boys!" yelled Ok Vok. And with a roaring shout, the whole crowd plunged toward Lester and Hoskins.

Knocked from their feet, buffeted about by clutching hands seeking to grasp them, Lester and his comrade were only saved from immediate annihilation by the fact that the great number of their attackers hampered them. They sprawled, trying to scramble up, and heard Ard Vark's roaring voice checking the crowd.

"Wait, fellows!" Ard Vark was roaring. "We don't want to kill 'em as quick as all this. We want to take them to the Supers. The Supers will be able to think up the most appropriate way to execute 'em."

Lester and Hoskins were hauled to their feet. They were appalled by the blaze in the eyes of the fantastic Martian throng.

"Don't try to escape, you two!" Ard Vark rasped to them. "You're going to the Supers. They'll decide the best punishment for your crime."

"What crime?" stammered Hoskins feebly. "What did we ever do to you?"

"As though you didn't know!" raged Ard Vark. "It was you dirty Earthmen who created us, and well you know it."

"*Created* you?" gasped Lester. "What in the name of heaven are you talking about?"

"This settles it," announced Hoskins with conviction. We're lying back in the rocket uncon-

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scious. Boil or no boil, I'm dreaming."

The two were hauled forward through a hostile, raging throng of Martians of every size and shape and hue. Arms, claws, feelers and knives reached toward them. Hate of them seemed to be universal.

Ard Vark and his comrades dragged the Earthmen on, through the madly variegated sections of the amazing city, until they reached a section that was composed of enormous golden pyramids. They were hauled into the largest of the pyramidal structures, the crowd following.

Inside were towering machines, glowing arcs, a paraphernalia of scientific equipment. Moving about in experiment or sitting motionless in study were scores of the most hideous Martians they had yet seen—octopoid creature with enormous staring eyes and eight black tentacles.

"Are these the Supers?" cried Lester, recoiling.

"Sure, they're the Super-scientific Martians, as well *you* know," rasped Ard Vark. "Come on—there's Agan, their chief scientist."

They were hauled in front of an octopoid creature who contemplated them for a moment with staring eyes and then spoke in whistling tones.

"My powers of telepathy enable me to see at once that these are two Earthmen who have landed on our world," he piped in stilted English. "One is named Lester and the other is named Hollins."

"Hoskins," corrected the older engineer falteringly.

The octopoid Agan gave him an angry look. "That's close enough," he snapped. "After all, even a telepathist can make a mistake."

Lester was goggling at the creature. "Super-scientific Martians with octopus bodies!" he choked. "It's just like in a fantastic novel I read—"

Agan said sourly in his piping tones, "Yes, it was that story that was responsible for our being here."

Lester's jaw sagged. "Do you mean to say that because a story about octopus Martians was written back on Earth, you octopus-men appeared here? That the story *created* you?"

"Certainly," snapped the octopoid. "Does that surprise you?"

Hoskins laughed a little wildly. "Oh, no, it doesn't surprise us. Nothing on this wacky planet could surprise us any more."

"Shut up, Hoskins," ordered Lester. He addressed himself earnestly to Agan. "Let's get this straight. How in the world could a story written about octopus Martians create octopus Martians here, forty million miles away?"

"I see you know little about mental force," remarked Agan, deftly scratching the back of his bulbous head with a tentacle. "It wasn't merely the fact that a

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story was written about us that did it. It was the fact that hundreds of thousands of people read that story, and imagined us as they read it."

"I still don't see—" muttered Lester.

"It's simple," snapped the octopus man impatiently. "Mental radiation is a definite physical force, as tangible as radio waves through in a far different spectrum. Those high frequency mental waves, when intense enough, can cause a reshaping of free atoms into new forms."

He waved a tentacle didactically. "When you think hard about a certain object you can visualize it, can't you? That's because your mind's mental radiation has momentarily reshuffled atoms into a transitory shadowy image of what you're thinking of. The image only lasts a moment and then it's gone, of course.

"But when thousands of people all imagine the same thing, their cumulative mental force is so powerful that it can reshuffle atoms into a permanent new form. That's why, when thousands of Earth readers read of the octopus-men in the story and imagined them, their mental radiation acted upon the free atoms of this planet and shifted them into living creatures such as they imagined into *us*."

Lester objected feebly. "But why wouldn't the effect of the massed mental radiation been manifested on Earth, where the readers all were, instead of away out here on Mars?"

Agan explained. "That's simple. Mental radiation follows definite lines of force, just like magnetic lines of force. The lines of mental force flow outward through the solar system, from Earth toward Mars. So all the weird Martians whom people of Earth imagine automatically are created here from the free atoms of this planet."

"It's too much for me," asserted Hoskins thickly.

Lester looked at Ard Vark and the other angry bug-eyed men. "Then all these other different races of Martians here—"

"They were all described by some Earth author in a story," Agan answered, "and each time when the story was read and imagined by thousands of readers, the Martians described in it were created here."

The octopoid creature added, "Each time an author described his Martians, he described their city. Each city was different from the others. That's why we have so many different kinds of buildings and people."

"Yes, and that's why Mars is so cursed crowded these days!" exclaimed Ard Vark angrily. His bulging eyes glared at Hoskins and Lester. "And it's all you Earthmen's fault. If you hadn't started writing so many cursed stories about Martians, we'd never have got in such a mess."

The bug-eyed man made an angry gesture toward the crowd

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behind him. "Look at that crowd —Martians of every size, shape and color! Why the devil couldn't your Earthmen's writers have been satisfied to have just one kind of Martian in your stories? Then everything would have been nice here. But no, every cursed writer has to think up a goofier kind of Martian, and the planet is getting so crowded with weird jerks of all kinds that you don't know whether a new creature is some kind of fierce monster or just a new kind of Martian!"

Ok Vok, beside him, added his own fierce accusation. "And why the devil did you have to give us all such crazy names? Look at me—Ok Vok! How would *you* like to have a name like that? It sounds like somebody choking to death."

Lester weakly attempted a defense. "But the writers who turned out those stories and the people who read them never dreamed that they were actually creating you all out here!"

"That's the trouble—you Earthmen don't seem to know anything!" snapped Agan, the octopus-man. "Take us, for instance—we were described as super-scientific Martians, with huge brains and unparalleled scientific knowledge. But when we appeared here, we didn't know beans about science."

"Why didn't you?" Lester asked wonderingly. "If the author had described you as possessing great scientific knowledge—"

"Ah, but the author himself didn't know anything about science," retorted Agan. "He didn't tell anything about our scientific abilities, because he was so ignorant of science he couldn't."

Hoskins stared around the hall of machines and octopoid experimenters. "You seem to know a lot about science now."

"That," said Agan, "is only because we fortunately had big brains and thus were able to learn a lot for ourselves. We had to pick up all our science that way! Our author could never have given us any, for I doubt if he knew the difference between a neutron and a nova."

"That's the devil of it," agreed Ard Vark gloomily. "They don't know anything about science, and so all the super-scientific stuff they imagine that is created here just won't work. Like the disintegrating rays we're supposed to have—they wouldn't hurt a fly! And our wonderful space-ships, which are so impractical that the man doesn't live who could get one off the ground."

Lester had an inspiration. "Then the reason that you all speak English is because—"

Agan made an affirmative gesture. "Yes, because in the stories we all spoke English. It's the only language we know."

"Except for the six-eyed men," put in Ard Vark.

"That's right," admitted the octopoid. He told Lester, "There seems to have been one Earth author who wanted to be realistic. Instead of having his Mar-

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tians, who were six-eyed yellow men, speak English, he had them say stuff like *'Quabo ump goo-hoo,'* and gibberish like that which was supposed to be a language. So now all those poor yellow devils go around here, not knowing any English, and babbling stuff like *'Quabo ump,'* at each other. They don't know what it means and nobody else does."

Ard Vark shifted impatiently. "This isn't getting us anywhere, Agan. The question is, what are we going to do with these two Earthmen? How are we going to execute them? It ought to be something original and good."

Zing Zau, one of the other bug-eyed red men, advanced a suggestion. "Why not turn them over to the ten-legged purple men? Those purple lads are experts at torturing—spend all their time threatening people with hideous deaths and leering fiendishly at each other. It seems their author was somewhat on the lurid side."

Lester quailed. It sounded insane to think that he might be killed by Martians created by mental force. But these creatures were as real as he was, no matter their strange origin, and they could do it.

"Why should you want to kill us?" he cried. "After all, you ought to be grateful to Earthmen. If it wasn't for us and our stories, you wouldn't have ever existed here at all."

Ard Vark uttered an angry roar. "But why the devil did you have to make us such grotesque freaks as this? Why did you have to put bug eyes on us? How'd you like to go around with bug eyes, huh?"

"Yes, and how would you enjoy having eight tentacles instead of decent arms and legs?" Agan demanded spitefully. "Do you think it's fun to get around on tentacles? Try it and see!"

"Yes, and what about the hellish weather you've caused here?" demanded Ok Vok accusingly.

"The weather?" Lester repeated bewilderedly. "Good Lord, do you mean to say that the weather here on Mars follows the stories that are written on Earth?"

"Of course—the mental force shifts the free atoms of the air easily," declared Agan. "We never know what kind of weather to expect next."

He explained gloomily. "Most of your Earth writers seem to describe a fairly decent climate here on Mars—warm and sunny in the day and not too terrible cold at night. But now and then some writer of the type that stickles for scientific accuracy comes along, and his story makes Mars as cold as your astronomers say it ought to be. Then we nearly die from the cold!"

"And the way the canals come and go is nearly as bad," grunted Ard Vark.

"You mean there *are* canals here?" cried Hoskins.

"Sometimes there are and sometimes there aren't," de-

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clared Ark Vark. "Apparently some stories have canals in them and some don't. The way they appear and disappear is upsetting."

The bug-eyed man, reciting his grievances, seemed to have worked himself into a rage.

"What about it, Agan?" he demanded fiercely. "Shall we turn these two fellows over to the purple men?"

From the crowd that pressed inside the building came an affirmative roar. Blue, green and pink Martians waved arms, feet and feelers in ferocious agreement.

"Wait!" Lester exclaimed. "Can't we talk this over? Suppose we go back to Earth and explain the situation to the people there. We could get them to standardize the stories on one kind of Martian and one kind of weather, and so on."

His proposal was flatly rejected by Ard Vark. "You'd never succeed. They'd insist on more stories about Mars and they'd insist on all kinds of new Martians and monsters and such in every story."

Ok Vok was glowering at the two Earthmen. "It's too bad you're not two of the fellows who wrote those cursed stories. I'd like to get hold of the chap who gave me my name. I'd Ok Vok him!"

A voice from the crowd yelled, "Here come the purple men now!"

Lester and Hoskins recoiled from the hideous spectacle of the group of creatures who came eagerly shuffling into the hall.

These were purple-skinned men with ten limbs along their bodies in centipede fashion, which served either as arms or legs. From their conical heads glared one enormous saucer-like eye. They held various metal knives, scalpels and pincers that looked ominous to the eyes of the two scared Earthmen.

"Let's have them!" hissed the leader of the purple men, fixing a hungry eye on Lester and Hoskins. "Boy, will we torture them! It's the first real chance we've had to show what we can do."

Lester was appalled. "Good Lord, why should you want to torture us?" he exclaimed to the hideous creature.

The purple leader shrugged ten shoulders. "That's the kind of Martians we are, fellow. It's not our fault—the chap that wrote us described us as loving to torture any Earthmen or women who happened to fall into our grasp."

He asked almost wistfully, "You haven't got a beautiful blonde daughter of an Earth scientist with you, have you? No? That's too bad—we could really show some fancy tortures on a beautiful blonde."

The purple creatures shuffled forward toward Lester and Hoskins.

"It can't be real!" gasped Hoskins. "I tell you, we're dreaming—"

The five pairs of hands that

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gripped him were no dream. They both were being hauled out toward the shouting crowd—

"Wait a minute!" shouted a piping voice from behind them. It came from Agan.

The octopoid super-scientific Martian was rising from his seat. There was an awkward delay while he untwisted three of his tentacles that had got tangled together.

"Cursed tentacles are always tripping me up," he muttered vexedly. He came wobbling on the queer limbs toward the purple men who held Lester and Hoskins.

"I've got an idea about these Earthmen," he declared loudly. "Maybe we can use them to stop this Earth interference with our world, once and for all."

Every Martian face in the crowd turned eagerly toward the octopoid.

"What's your idea, Agan?" demanded Ard Vark.

Agan's piping voice came louder. "As you no doubt remember, the hypnoid stasis of the neuronic patterns of the brain can be scanned by an extra-electromagnetic beam which—"

"Come off it!" said Ard Vark impatiently. "What do you mean —as we no doubt remember?" How can we remember it when we never knew it? You know we don't know any real science."

"You might have given me a chance to give the scientific explanation of my idea," Agan said injuredly to the bug-eyed man. "Anyway, this is the gist of it. We Supers have a way of learning everything in a man's mind, by scanning it in a hypnotic state. We could use it on these two men. They're obviously scientists with considerable knowledge of Earth. We could glean information about Earth from their minds, which we've never been able to obtain before."

"What good would that do us?" Ard Vark demanded rudely.

"That," retorted Agan, "is my idea. If we Supers knew more data on Earth conditions, we should be able to devise a machine that will *stop* the flow of mental force-lines from Earth toward Mars. That would halt the affecting of Mars conditions by Earth minds."

There was a pause while the crowd considered this. The purple man who held Lester hissed a hopeful question.

"Then after that, we could torture them?" he asked.

Lester saw a faint chance. "We won't let you do it!" he told Agan loudly. "We'll resist the hypnosis and wreck your chances, unless you agree to set us free and let us return to Earth afterward."

A cry of dissent broke out from the weird Martian throng. "Don't let them go! This is our chance to get back at the Earthmen!"

But Agan reasoned earnestly with the crowd. "What if we do let them go? Isn't it better to do that than to suffer forever from interference by the cursed Earth

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writers and their stories? Do you want new Martians of all shapes appearing here perpetually? Do you want the weather to keep changing the way it does? Here's our chance to stop all that for good."

His reasoning won them over. Reluctantly, they consented, though the purple men held out desperately for torture.

"Cooperate with us, and you'll be allowed to return to your rocket," Agan assured Lester and Hoskins. "All you have to do is step under that big machine over there and make your minds submissive."

"Come on, Hoskins," muttered Lester. "It's our only chance to get away from this crazy planet."

Gingerly, they moved under the machine. From its broad lens, a flood of blue light streamed down over them. Lester felt his brain darken as the force tingled through it. He lost consciousness.

When he awoke, he found himself and Hoskins staggering under the machine. But the force had been turned off.

Agan and the other octopus super-scientists were brandishing a pad of thin metal leaves covered with writing, to the weird crowd.

"I've got it all—the experiment was a complete success!" Agan cried exultantly.

"You got enough data from our minds to enable you to stop the flow of mental force-lines from Earth to Mars?" Hoskins stammered.

There was a triumphant gleam in Agan's huge eyes. "I can do *more* than halt those lines of force, now."

"Then we can go?" Lester pressed tensely. "You promised we could."

"Yes, you can return to your rocket and go back to Earth," Agan declared.

Ard Vark added sourly to the two Earthmen, "And don't ever come back here to Mars, if you know what's good for you."

The ten-legged purple leader made a frenzied appeal. "Are you going to let them walk out of here without torturing them at all?" There were tears in his single big eye. "How are we going to live up to our fiendish natures when we never get a chance to torture anybody? How would you like it?"

"He's right—we're letting slip the only chance we'll ever have to revenge ourselves on the Earthmen for all they've done to Mars," muttered Ok Vok angrily.

"We've given our promise and must let them go," Agan declared firmly. The gleam came back into his eyes. "But never fear, we'll yet have revenge on the Earthmen for all they've done to us."

A path was cleared through the crowd. Ark Vark pointed along it. "Get going while you can!" he snapped to Lester and Hoskins.

The two Earthmen stumbled

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out through the crowd of glaring faces, expecting each moment to be seized. They broke into a breathless run through the weirdly variegated sections of the fantastic city.

Not even when they had left the city behind and were stumbling across the sunlit red sand did they slacken their pace. Not until they had reached the metal bulk of the rocket and had tumbled inside and slammed its heavy door.

"For the love of Heaven, let's get away quick!" gulped Hoskins, starting the cyclotrons. "I never thought they'd let us go, really."

"Neither did I," admitted Lester. He frowned. "I still don't feel safe. There was a look of triumph about Agan that I didn't like, when he spoke about future revenge on Earthmen—"

He was interrupted by the blast of keel rockets as the craft lurched skyward. Crushing them deep into the recoil chairs, it roared up into the brassy sky and headed for clear space and Earth. They were on their way back.

By the time, two weeks later, that the rocket was roaring in toward Earth, both men had somewhat recovered from the shock of their amazing experience. And they were debating how much of it they should tell.

"They'll never believe us!" Hoskins argued strenuously. "If we try to tell them that the mental force of thousands of readers actually created bug-eyed men and other monsters on Mars, they'll ridicule us."

"Maybe you're right," Lester admitted. "Maybe we'd better say nothing about it."

The rocket dropped toward New York. It was their plan to land in Central Park, to electrify the metropolis and the world by their dramatic return.

But when the craft finally came to rest in the park, the two returned explorers were met by no cheering throng. They stepped out into the sunlight and stared bewilderedly at nearby Fifth Avenue.

A crazy uproar of excitement seemed sweeping the street. Crowds of citizens were rushing along it in panic flight. Then Lester and Hoskins gasped as they saw the creatures from which the horrified crowd fled.

They were a score of men. They looked like Earthmen in many ways and wore Earth clothing. But they had four arms instead of two. And they had enormous, bulging eyes like the eyes of insects.

Lester stopped a fleeing citizen and pointed wildly at the weird figures from which the crowd fled.

"Where in Heaven's name did *they* come from?" he cried horrifiedly.

The panicky citizen shook his head wildly. "Nobody knows! They and a lot of other monstrous people as hideous as they have been appearing all over the

(*Concluded on page* 39)

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SOLANDER'S RADIO TOMB

By ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

"Pigs Is Pigs" Butler quite surpasses himself in this story. The intricacies in radio are so great, and the changes occur so quickly that no one can afford to make a will wherein a radio provision figures. Once we thought of having a radio loud speaker installed in our coffin to keep us company and make it less lonesome. After reading this story we quickly changed our mind. The possibilities are too various.

I FIRST met Mr. Remington Solander shortly after I installed my first radio set. I was going in to New York on the 8:15 A.M. train and was sitting with my friend Murchison and, as a matter of course, we were talking radio. I had just told Murchison that he was a lunkheaded noodle and that for two cents I would poke him in the jaw, and that even a pin-headed idiot ought to know that a tube set was better than a crystal set. To this Murchison had replied that that settled it. He said he had always known I was a moron, and now he was sure of it.

"If you had enough brains to fill a hazelnut shell," he said, "you wouldn't talk that way. Anybody but a half-baked lunatic would know that what a man wants in radio is clear, sharp reception and that's what a crystal gives you. You're one of these half-wits that think they're classy if they can hear some two-cent station five hundred miles away utter a few faint squeaks. Shut up! I don't want to talk to you. I don't want to listen to you. Go and sit somewhere else."

Of course, this was what was to be expected of Murchison. And if I did let out a few laps of anger, I feel I was entirely justified. Radio fans are always disputing over the relative merits of crystal and tube sets, but

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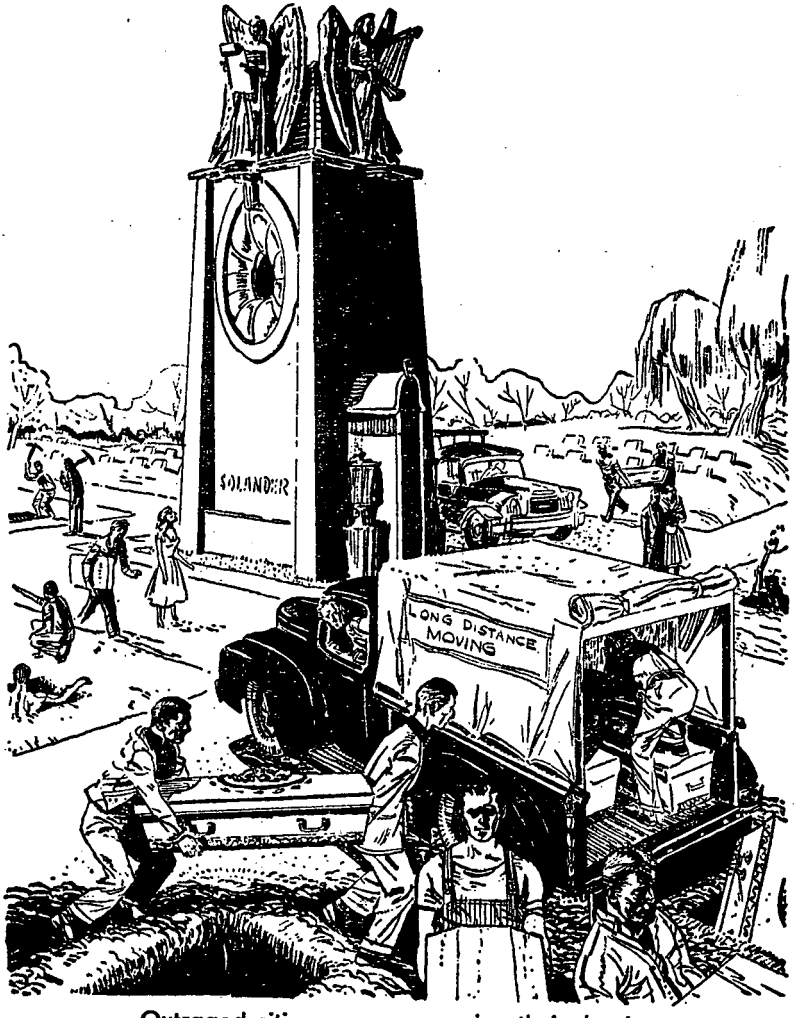

Outraged citizens were removing their dead.

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I knew I was right. I was just trying to decide whether to choke Murchison with my bare hand and throw his lifeless body out of the car window, or tell him a few things I had been wanting to say ever since he began knocking my tube set, when this Remington Solander, who was sitting behind us, leaned forward and tapped me on the shoulder. I turned quickly and saw his long sheeplike face close to mine. He was chewing cardamon seed and breathing the odor into my face.

"My friend," he said, "come back and sit with me; I want to ask you a few questions about radio."

Well, I couldn't resist that, could I? No radio fan could. I did not care much for the looks of this Remington Solander man, but for a few weeks my friends had seemed to be steering away from me when I drew near, although I am sure I never said anything to bore them. All I ever talked about was my radio set and some new hook-ups I was trying, but I had noticed that men who formerly had seemed to be fond of my company now gave startled looks when I neared them. Some even climbed over the nearest fence and ran madly across vacant lots, looking over their shoulders with frightened glances as they ran. For a week I had not been able to get any man of my acquaintance to listen to one word from me, except Murchison, and he is an utter idiot, as I think I have made clear. So I left Murchison and sat with Remington Solander.

In one way I was proud to be invited to sit with Remington Solander, because he was far and away the richest man in our town. When he died, his estate proved to amount to three million dollars. I had seen him often, and I knew who he was, but he was a stand-offish old fellow and did not mix, so I had never met him. He was a tall man and thin, somewhat flabby and he was pale in an unhealthy sort of way. But, after all, he was a millionaire and a member of one of the "old families" of Westcote, so I took the seat alongside of him with considerable satisfaction.

"I gather," he said as soon as I was seated, "that you are interested in radio."

I told him I was.

"And I'm just building a new set, using a new hook-up that I heard of a week ago," I said. "I think it is going to be a wonder. Now, here is the idea: instead of using a grid——"

"Yes, yes!" the old aristocrat said hastily. "But never mind that now. I know very little of such things. I have an electrician employed by the year to care for my radio set and I leave all such things to him. You are a lawyer, are you not?"

I told him I was.

"And you are chairman of the trustees of the Westcote Cemetery, are you not?" he asked.

I told him I was that also.

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And I may say that the Westcote Cemetery Association is one of the rightest and tightest little corporations in existence. It has been in existence since 1808 and has been exceedingly profitable to those fortunate enough to hold its stock. I inherited the small block I own from my grandfather. Recently we trustees had bought sixty additional acres adjoining the old cemetery and had added them to it, and we were about ready to put the new lots on the market. At $300 apiece there promised to be a tremendous profit in the thing, for our cemetery was a fashionable place to be buried in and the demand for the lots in the new addition promised to be enormous.

"You have not known it," said Remington Solander in his slow drawl, which had the effect of letting his words slide out of his mouth and drip down his long chin like cold molasses, "but I have been making inquiries about you, and I have been meaning to speak to you. I am drawing up a new last will and testament, and I want you to draw up one of the clauses for me without delay."

"Why, certainly, Mr. Solander," I said with increased pride. "I'll be glad to be of service to you."

"I am choosing you for the work," Remington Solander said, "because you know and love radio as I do, and because you are a trustee of the cemetery association. Are you a religious man?"

"Well," I said, a little uneasily, "some. Some, but not much."

"No matter," said Mr. Solander, placing a hand on my arm. "I am. I have always been. From my earliest youth my mind has been on serious things. As a matter of fact, sir, I have compiled a manuscript collection of religious quotations, hymns, sermons and uplifting thoughts which now fill fourteen volumes, all in my own handwriting. Fortunately, I inherited money, and this collection is my gift to the world."

"And a noble one, I'm sure," I said.

"Most noble," said Mr. Solander. "But, sir, I have not confined my activities to the study chair. I have kept my eye on the progress of the world. And it seems to me that radio, this new and wonderful invention, is the greatest discovery of all ages and imperishable. But, sir, it is being twisted to cheap uses. Jazz! Cheap songs! Worldly words and music! That I mean to remedy."

"Well," I said, "it might be done. Of course, people like what they like."

"Some nobler souls like better things," said Remington Solander solemnly. "Some more worthy men and women will welcome nobler radio broadcasting. In my will I am putting aside one million dollars to establish and maintain a broadcasting station that will broad-

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cast only my fourteen volumes of hymns and uplifting material. Every day this matter will go forth—sermons, lectures on prohibition, noble thoughts and religious poems."

I assured him that some people might be glad to get that—that a lot of people might, in fact, and that I could write that into his will without any trouble at all.

"Ah!" said Remington Solander. "But that is already in my will. What I want you to write for my will, is another clause. I mean to build, in your cemetery, a high-lass and imperishable granite tomb for myself. I mean to place it on that knoll—that high knoll—the highest spot in your cemetery. What I want you to write into my will is a clause providing for the perpetual care and maintenance of my tomb. I want to set aside five hundred thousand dollars for that purpose."

"Well," I said to the sheep-faced millionaire, "I can do that, too."

"Yes," he agreed. "And I want to give my family and relations the remaining million and a half dollars, provided," he said, accenting the 'provided,' "they carry out faithfully the provisions of the clause providing for the perpetual care and maintenance of my tomb. If they don't care and maintain," he said, giving me a hard look, "that million and a half is to go to the Home for Flea-Bitten Dogs."

"They'll care and maintain, all right!" I laughed.

"I think so," said Remington Solander gravely. "I do think so, indeed! And now, sir, we come to the important part. You, as I know, are a trustee of the cemetery."

"Yes," I said, "I am."

"For drawing this clause of my will, if you can draw it," said Remington Solander, looking me full in the eye with both his own, which were like the eyes of a salt mackerel, "I shall pay you five thousand dollars."

Well, I almost gasped. It was a big lot of money for drawing one clause of a will, and I began to smell a rat right there. But, I may say, the proposition Remington Solander made to me was one I was able, after quite a little talk with my fellow trustees of the cemetery, to carry out. What Remington Solander wanted was to be permitted to put a radio loud-speaking outfit in his granite tomb—a radio loud-speaking outfit permanently set at 327 meters wave-length, which was to be the wave-length of his endowed broadcasting station. I don't know how Remington Solander first got his remarkable idea, but just about that time an undertaker in New York had rigged up a hearse with a phonograph so that the hearse would loud-speak suitable hymns on the way to the cemetery, and that may have suggested the loud-speaking tomb to Remington Solander, but it is not important where he got the

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idea. He had it, and he was set on having it carried out.

"Think," he said, "of the uplifting effect of it! On the highest spot in the cemetery will stand my noble tomb, loud-speaking in all directions the solemn and holy words and music I have collected in my fourteen volumes. All who enter the cemetery will hear; all will be ennobled and uplifted."

That was so, too. I saw that at once. I said so. So Remington Solander went on to explain that the income from the five hundred thousand dollars would be set aside to keep "A" batteries and "B" batteries supplied, to keep the outfit in repair, and so on. So I tackled the job rather enthusiastically. I don't say that the five thousand dollar fee did not interest me, but I did think Remington Solander had a grand idea. It would make our cemetery stand out. People would come from everywhere to see and listen. The lots in the new addition would sell like hot cakes.

But I did have a little trouble with the other trustees. They balked when I explained that Remington Solander wanted the sole radio loud-speaking rights of our cemetery, but some one finally suggested that if Remington Solander put up a new and artistic iron fence around the whole cemetery it might be all right. They made him submit his fourteen volumes so they could see what sort of matter he meant to broadcast from his high-class station, and they agreed it was solemn enough; it was all solemn and sad and gloomy, just the stuff for a cemetery. So when Remington Solander agreed to build the new iron fence they made a formal contract with him, and I drew up the clause for the will, and he bought six lots on top of the high knoll and began erecting his marble mausoleum.

For eight months or so Remington Solander was busier than he had ever been in his life. He superintended the building of the tomb and he had on hand the job of getting his endowed radio station going—it was given the letters WZZZ—and hiring artists to sing and play and speechify his fourteen volumes of gloom and uplift at 327 meters, and it was too much for the old codger. The very night the test of the WZZZ outfit was made he passed away and was no more on earth.

His funeral was one of the biggest we ever had in Westcote. I should judge that five thousand people attended his remains to the cemetery, for it had become widely known that the first WZZZ program would be received and loud-spoken from Remington Solander's tomb that afternoon, the first selection on the program—his favorite hymn—beginning as the funeral cortège left the church and the program continuing until dark.

I'll say it was one of the most affecting occasions I have ever

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witnessed. As the body was being carried into the tomb the loud speaker gave us a sermon by Rev. Peter L. Ruggus, full of sob stuff, and every one of the five thousand present wept. And when the funeral was really finished, over two thousand remained to hear the rest of the program, which consisted of hymns, missionary reports, static and recitations of religious poems. We increased the price of the lots in the new addition one hundred dollars per lot immediately, and we sold four lots that afternoon and two the next morning. The big metropolitan newspapers all gave the Westcote Cemetery full page illustrated articles the next Sunday, and we received during the next week over three hundred letters, mostly from ministers, praising what we had done.

But that was not the best of it. Requests for lots began to come in by mail. Not only people in Westcote wrote for prices, but people away over in New Jersey and up in Westchester Country, and even from as far away as Poughkeepsie and Delaware. We had twice as many requests for lots as there were lots to sell, and we decided we would have an auction and let them go to the highest bidders. You see Remington Solander's Talking Tomb was becoming nationally famous. We began to negotiate with the owners of six farms adjacent to our cemetery; we figured on buying them and making more new additions to the cemetery. And then we found we could not use three of the farms.

The reason was that the loud speaker in Remington Solander's tomb would not carry that far; it was not strong enough. So we went to the executors of his estate and ran up against another snag—nothing in the radio outfit in the tomb could be altered in any way whatever. That was in the will. The same loud speaker had to be maintained, the same wave-length had to be kept, the same makes of batteries had to be used, the same style of tubes had to be used. Remington Solander had thought of all that. So we decided to let well enough alone—it was all we could do anyway. We bought the farms that were reached by the loud speaker and had them surveyed and laid out in lots—and then the thing happened!

Yes, sir, I'll sell my cemetery stock for two cents on the dollar, if anybody will bid that much for it. For what do you think happened? Along came the Government of the United States, regulating this radio thing, and assigned new wave-lengths to all the broadcasting stations. It gave Remington Solander's endowed broadcasting station WZZZ an 855-meter wave-length, and it gave that station at Dodwood—station PKX—the 327-meter wave-length, and the next day poor old Remington Solander's tomb

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poured fourth "Yes, We Ain't Got No Bananas" and the "Hot Dog" jazz and "If You Don't See Mama Every Night, You Can't See Mama At All," and Hink Tubbs in his funny stories, like "Well, one day an Irishman and a Swede were walking down Broadway and they see a flapper coming towards them. And she had on one of them short skirts they was wearing, see? So Mike he says 'Gee be jabbers, Ole, I see a peach.' So the Swede he says lookin' at the silk stockings, 'Mebby you ban see a peach, Mike, but I ban see one mighty nice pair.' Well, the other day I went to see my mother-in-law—"

You know the sort of program. I don't say that the people who like them are not entitled to them, but I do say they are not the sort of programs to loudspeak from a tomb in a cemetery. I expect old Remington Solander turned clear over in his tomb when those programs began to come through. I know our board of trustees went right up in the air, but there was not a thing we could do about it. The newspapers gave us double pages the next Sunday—"Remington Solander's Jazz Tomb" and "Westcote's Two-Step Cemetery." And within a week the inmates of our cemetery began to move out. Friends of people who had been buried over a hundred years came and moved them to other cemeteries and took the headstones and monuments with them, and in a month our cemetery looked like one of those Great War battlefields—like a lot of shell-holes. Not a man, woman or child was left in the place—except Remington Solander in his granite tomb on top of the high knoll. What we've got on our hands is a deserted cemetery.

They all blame me, but I can't do anything about it. All I can do is groan—every morning I grab the paper and look for the PKX program and then I groan. Remington Solander is the lucky man—he's dead. **THE END**

WACKY WORLD

(*Concluded from page* 31)

world in the last week—we don't know how they come into being or who they are!"

Lester went pale. He grabbed Hoskins' arm. "Good Lord, this is what Agan meant when he said they'd soon have revenge on the Earthmen! The data he got from our minds—it enabled him not only to stop the flow of mental force-lines from Earth to Mars, but to *reverse* them, to make the currents of mental force flow now from Mars to Earth!"

Hoskins' jaw sagged. "Then these creatures were created here as a revenge by—"

"By the Martians, yes!" Lester cried. "That's their revenge on us! They're up there now, the devils, writing stories about bug-eyed Earthmen!"

THE END

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Lee Anthony crouched and set himself to resist

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By RAY CUMMINGS

THE WORLD BEYOND

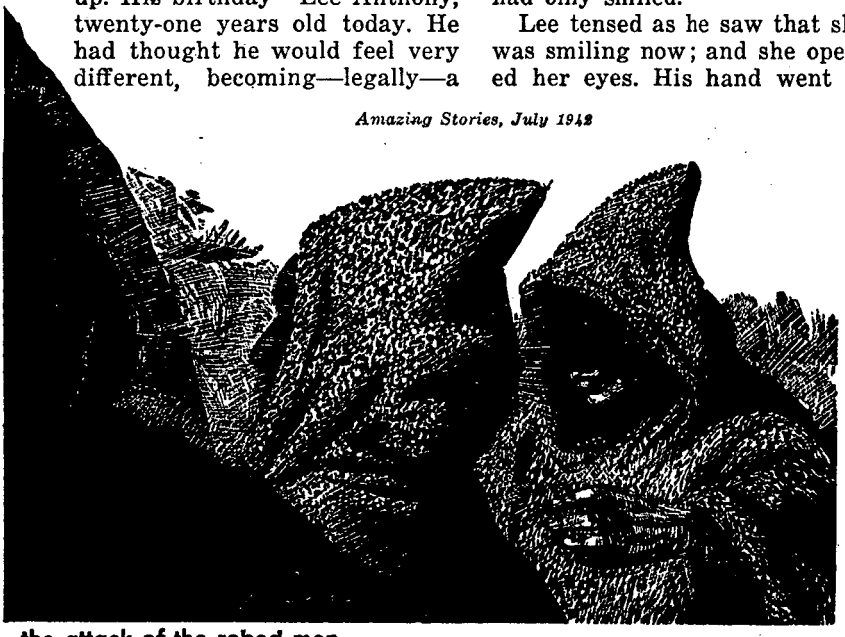
Out of nowhere came these grim, cold, black-clad men, to kidnap three Earth people and carry them to a weird and terrible world where a man could be a giant at will.

THE old woman was dying. There could be no doubt of it now. Surely she would not last through the night. In the dim quiet bedroom he sat watching her, his young face grim and awed. Pathetic business, this ending of earthly life, this passing on. In the silence, from the living room downstairs the gay laughter of the young people at the birthday party came floating up. His birthday—Lee Anthony, twenty-one years old today. He had thought he would feel very different, becoming—legally—a man. But the only difference now, was that old Anna Green who had been always so good to him, who had taken care of him almost all his life, now was dying.

Terrible business. But old age is queer. Anna knew what was happening. The doctor, who had given Lee the medicines and said he would be back in the morning, hadn't fooled her. And she had only smiled.

Lee tensed as he saw that she was smiling now; and she opened her eyes. His hand went to

Amazing Stories, July 1942



the attack of the robed men.

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hers where it lay, so white, blue-veined on the white bedspread.

"I'm here, Anna. Feel better?"

"Oh, yes. I'm all right." Her faint voice, gently tired, mingled with the sounds from the party downstairs. She heard the laughter. "You should be down there, Lee. I'm all right."

"I should have postponed it," he said. "And what you did, preparing for it—"

She interrupted him, raising her thin arm, which must have seemed so heavy that at once she let it fall again. "Lee—I guess I am glad you're here—want to talk to you—and I guess it better be now."

"Tomorrow—you're too tired now—"

"For me," she said with her gentle smile, "there may not be any tomorrow—not here. Your grandfather, Lee—you really don't remember him?"

"I was only four or five."

"Yes. That was when your father and mother died in the aero accident and your grandfather brought you to me."

Very vaguely he could remember it. He had always understood that Anna Green had loved his grandfather, who had died that same year.

"What I want to tell you, Lee —" She seemed summoning all her last remaining strength. "Your grandfather didn't die. He just went away. What you've never known—he was a scientist. But he was a lot more than that. He had—dreams. Dreams of what we mortals might be—what we ought to be—but are not. And so he—went away."

This dying old woman; her mind was wandering? . . .

"Oh—yes," Lee said. "But you're much too tired now, Anna dear—"

"Please let me tell you. He had—some scientific apparatus. I didn't see it—I don't know where he went. I think he didn't know either, where he was going. But he was a very good man, Lee. I think he had an intuition—an inspiration. Yes, it must have been that. A man—inspired. And so he went. I've never seen or heard from him since. Yet—what he promised me—if he could accomplish it—tonight—almost now, Lee, would be the time—"

Just a desperately sick old woman whose blurred mind was seeing visions. The thin wrinkled face, like crumpled white parchment, was transfigured as though by a vision. Her sunken eyes were bright with it. A wonderment stirred within Lee Anthony. Why was his heart pounding? It seemed suddenly as though he must be sharing this unknown thing of science—and mysticism. As though something within him—his grandfather's blood perhaps—was responding. . . . He felt suddenly wildly excited.

"Tonight?" he murmured.

"Your grandfather was a very good man, Lee—"

"And you, Anna—all my life I have known how good you are.

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Not like most women—you're just all gentleness—just kindness—"

"That was maybe—just an inspiration from him." Her face was bright with it. "I've tried to bring you up—the way he told me. And what I must tell you now—about tonight, I mean—because I may not live to see it—"

Her breath gave out so that her faint tired voice trailed away

"What?" he urged. "What is it, Anna? About tonight—"

What a tumult of weird excitement was within him! Surely this was something momentous. His twenty-first birthday. Different, surely, for Lee Anthony than any similar event had ever been for anyone else.

"He promised me—when you were twenty-one—just then—at this time, if he could manage it—that he would come back—"

"Come back, Anna? Here?"

"Yes. To you and me. Because you would be a man—brought up, the best I could do to make you be—like him—because you would be a man who would know the value of love—and kindness—those things that ought to rule this world—but really do not."

This wild, unreasoning excitement within him . . .! "You think he will come—tonight, Anna?"

"I really do. I want to live to see him. But now—I don't know—"

He could only sit in silence, gripping her hand. And again the gay voices of his guests downstairs came up like a roar of intrusion. They didn't know that she was more than indisposed. She had made him promise not to tell them.

Her eyes had closed, and now she opened them again. "They're having a good time, aren't they, Lee? That's what I wanted—for you and them both. You see, I've had to be careful—not to isolate you from life—life as it is. Because your grandfather wanted you to be normal—a healthy, happy—regular young man. Not queer—even though I've tried to show you—"

"If he—he's coming tonight, Anna—we shouldn't have guests here."

"When they have had their fun—"

"They have. We're about finished down there. I'll get rid of them—tell them you're not very well—"

She nodded. "Perhaps that's best—now—"

He was hardly aware of how he broke up the party and sent them away. Then in the sudden heavy silence of the little cottage, here in the grove of trees near the edge of the town, he went quietly back upstairs.

Her eyes were closed. Her white face was placid. Her faint breath was barely discernible. Failing fast now. Quietly he sat beside her. There was nothing that he could do. The doctor had said that very probably she could not live through the night. Poor old Anna. His mind re-

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hearsed the life that she had given him. Always she had been so gentle, so wise, ruling him with kindness.

He remembered some of the things she had reiterated so often that his childish mind had come to realize their inevitable truth. The greatest instinctive desire of every living creature is happiness. And the way to get it was not by depriving others of it. It seemed now as though this old woman had had something of goodness inherent to her—as though she were inspired? And tonight she had said, with her gentle smile as she lay dying, that if that were so—it had been an inspiration from his grandfather.

Something of science which his grandfather had devised, and which had enabled him to—go away. What could that mean? Go where? And why had he gone? To seek an ideal? Because he was dissatisfied with life here? Her half incoherent words had seemed to imply that. And now, because Lee was twenty-one—a man—his grandfather was coming back. Because he had thought that Lee would be able to help him? . . . Help him to do—what?

He stirred in his chair. It was nearly midnight now. The little cottage—this little second floor bedroom where death was hovering — was heavy with brooding silence. It was awesome; almost frightening. He bent closer to the bed. Was she dead? No, there was still a faint fluttering breath, but it seemed now that there would be no strength for her to speak to him again.

Mysterious business, this passing on. Her eyelids were closed, a symbol of drawn blinds of the crumbling old house in which she had lived for so long. It was almost a tenantless house now. And yet she was somewhere down there behind those drawn blinds. Reluctant perhaps to leave, still she lingered, with the fires going out so that it must be cold . . . cold and silent where she huddled. Or was she hearing now the great organ of the Beyond with its sweep of harmonies summoning her to come—welcoming her. . . .

A shiver ran through young Lee Anthony as he saw that the pallid bloodless lips of the white wrinkled face had stirred into a smile. Down there somewhere her spirit—awed and a little frightened doubtless—had opened some door to let the sound of the organ in—and to let in the great riot of color which must have been outside. . . . And then she had not been frightened, but eager. . . .

He realized suddenly that he was staring at an empty shell and that old Anna Green had gone. . . .

A sound abruptly brought Lee out of his awed thoughts. It was outside the house—the crunching of wheels in the gravel of the driveway—the squeal of grinding brakes. A car had

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stopped. He sat erect in his chair, stiffened, listening, with his heart pounding so that the beat of it seemed to shake his tense body. His grandfather—returning?

An automobile horn honked. Footsteps sounded on the verandah. The front doorbell rang.

There were voices outside as he crossed the living room—a man's voice, and then a girl's laugh. He flung open the door. It was a young man in dinner clothes and a tall blonde girl. Tom Franklin, and a vivid, theatrical-looking girl, whom Lee had never seen before. She was inches taller than her companion. She stood clinging to his arm; her beautiful face, with beaded lashes and heavily rouged lips, was laughing. She was swaying; her companion steadied her, but he was swaying himself.

"Easy, Viv," he warned. "We made it—tol' you we would. . . . Hello there, Lee ol' man—your birthday—think I'd forget a thing like that, not on your life. So we come t'celebrate—meet Vivian Lamotte—frien' o' mine. Nice kid, Viv—you'll like her."

"Hello," the girl said. She stared up at Lee. He towered above her, and beside him the undersized and stoop-shouldered Franklin was swaying happily. Admiration leaped into the girl's eyes.

"Say," she murmured, "you sure are a swell looker for a fact. He said you were—but my Gawd—"

"And his birthday too," Frank agreed, "so we're gonna celebrate—" His slack-jawed, weak-chinned face radiated happiness and triumph. "Came fas' to get here in time. I tol' Viv I could make it—we never hit a thing—"

"Why, yes—come in," Lee agreed awkwardly. He had only met young Tom Franklin once or twice, a year ago now, and Lee had completely forgotten it. The son of a rich man, with more money than was good for him. . . . With old Anna lying there upstairs—surely he did not want these happy inebriated guests here now. . . .

He stood with them just inside the threshold. "I—I'm awfully sorry," he began. "My birthday—yes, but you see—old Mrs. Green—my guardian—just all the family I've got—she died, just a few minutes ago—upstairs here—I've been here alone with her—"

It sobered them. They stared blankly. "Say, my Gawd, that's tough," the girl murmured. "Your birthday too. Tommy listen, we gotta get goin—can't celebrate—"

It seemed that there was just a shadow out on the dark verandah. A tall figure in a dark cloak.

"Why—what the hell," Franklin muttered.

A group of gliding soundless figures were out there in the darkness. And across the living room the window sash went up with a thump. A black shape was there, huddled in a great

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loose cloak which was over the head so that the thing inside was shapeless.

For an instant Lee and his two companions stood stricken. The shapes seemed babbling with weird unintelligible words. Then from the window came words of English:

"*We—want—*" Slow words, strangely intoned. Young Tom Franklin broke in on them.

"Say—what the devil—who do you people think you are, comin' in here—" He took a swaying step over the threshold. There was a sudden sharp command from one of the shapes. Lee jumped in front of the girl. On the verandah the gliding figures were engulfiing Franklin; he had fallen.

Lee went through the door with a leap, his fist driving at the cowled head of one of the figures—a solid shape that staggered backward from his blow. But the others were on him, dropping down before his rush, gripping his legs and ankles. He went down, fighting. And then something struck his face—something that was like a hand, or a paw with claws that scratched him. His head suddenly was reeling; his senses fading. . . .

How long he fought Lee did not know. He was aware that the girl was screaming—and that he was hurling clutching figures away—figures that came pouncing back. Then the roaring in his head was a vast uproar. The fighting, scrambling dark shapes all seemed dwindling until they were tiny points of white light—like stars in the great abyss of nothingness. . . .

He knew—as though it were a blurred dream—that he was lying inert on the verandah, with Franklin and the girl lying beside him. . . . The house was being searched. . . . Then the muttering shapes were standing here. Lee felt himself being picked up. And then he was carried silently out into the darkness. The motion seemed to waft him off so that he knew nothing more.

CHAPTER II

The Flight Into Size and Space

LEE came back to consciousness with the feeling that some great length of time must have elapsed. He was on a couch in a small, weird-looking metal room—metal of a dull, grey-white substance like nothing he had ever seen before. With his head still swimming he got up dizzily on one elbow, trying to remember what had happened to him. That fingernail, or claw, had scratched his face. He had been drugged. It seemed obvious. He could remember his roaring senses as he had tried to fight, with the drug gradually overcoming him. . . .

The room had a small door, and a single round window, like a bullseye pane of thick lens. Outside there was darkness, with points of stars. His head was

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still humming from the remaining effect of the drug. Or was the humming an outside noise? He was aware as he got to his feet and staggered to the door, that the humming was distantly outside the room. The door was locked; its lever resisted his efforts to turn it.

There he saw the inert figures of the girl, and Tom Franklin. They were lying uninjured on two other small couches against the room's metal wall. The girl stirred a little as he touched her dank forehead. Her dyed blonde hair had fallen disheveled to her shoulders. Franklin lay sprawled, his stiff white shirt bosom dirty and rumpled, his thin sandy hair dangling over his flushed face. His slack mouth was open. He was breathing heavily.

At the lens-window Lee stood gasping, his mind still confused and blurred, trying to encompass what was out there. This was a spaceship! A small globular thing of the white metal. He could see a rim of it, like a flat ring some ten feet beneath him. A spaceship, and obviously it had left the Earth! There was a black firmament—dead-black monstrous abyss with white blazing points of stars. And then, down below and to one side there was just an edge of a great globe visible. The Earth, with the sunlight edging its sweeping crescent limb—the Earth, down there with a familiar coastline and a huge spread of ocean like a giant map in monochrome.

Back on the couch Lee sat numbed. There was the sound of scraping metal; a doorslide in the wall opened. A face was there—a man with a blur of opalescent light behind him.

"You are all right now?" a voice said.

"Yes. I guess so. Let me out of here—"

Let him out of here? To do what? To make them head this thing back to Earth. . . . To Lee Anthony as he sat confused, the very thoughts were a fantasy. . . . Off the Earth! Out in Space! So often he had read of it, as a future scientific possibility—but with this actuality now his mind seemed hardly to grasp it. . . .

The man's voice said gently, "We cannot trust you. There must be no fighting—"

"I won't fight. What good could it do me?"

"You did fight. That was bad—that was frightening. We must not harm you—"

"Where are we going?" Lee murmured. "Why in the devil are you—"

"We think now it is best to say nothing. We will give you food through here. And over there—behind you—a little doorslide to another room. You and these other two can be comfortable—"

"For how long?" Lee demanded.

"It should not seem many days. Soon we shall go fast. Please watch it at the window—he would want that. You have been taught some science?"

"Yes. I guess so."

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To Lee it was a weird, unnatural exchange between captor and captive. The voice, intoning the English words so slowly, so carefully, seemed gentle, concerned with his welfare . . . and afraid of him.

Abruptly the doorslide closed again, and then at once it reopened.

"He would want you to understand what you see," the man said. "You will find it very wonderful—we did, coming down here. This was his room—so long ago when he used it. His dials are there—you can watch them and try to understand. Dials to mark our distance and our size. The size-change will start soon."

Size-change? Lee's numbed mind turned over the words and found them almost meaningless.

"From the window there—what you can see will be very wonderful," the man said again. "He would want you to study it. Please do that."

The doorslide closed. . . .

What you can see from the window will be very wonderful. No one, during the days that followed could adequately describe what Lee Anthony and Thomas Franklin and Vivian saw through that lens-window. A vast panorama in monochrome... a soundless drama of the stars, so immense, so awesome that the human mind could grasp only an infinitesimal fragment of its wonders. . . .

They found the little door which led into another apartment. There were tables and chairs of earth-style, quaintly old-fashioned. Food and drink were shoved through the doorslide; the necessities of life and a fair comfort of living were provided. But their questions, even as the time passed and lengthened into what on Earth might have been a week or more, remained unanswered. There was only that gentle but firm negation:

"We have decided that he would want us to say nothing. We do not know about this girl and this smaller man. We brought them so that they could not remain on Earth to talk of having seen us. We are sorry about that. He probably won't like it."

"He? Who the devil are you talking about?" Franklin demanded. "See here, if I had you fellows back on Earth now I'd slam you into jail. Damned brigands. You can't do this to me! My—my father's one of the most important men in New York—"

But now the doorside quietly closed.

A week? It could have been that, or more. In a wall recess of the room Lee found a line of tiny dials with moving pointers. Miles—thousands of miles. A million; ten millions; a hundred million. A light-year; tens, thousands. And, for the size-change, a normal diameter, Unit 1—and then up into thousands.

For hours at a time, silent, awed beyond what he had ever conceived the emotion of awe could mean, he sat at the lens-

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window, staring out and trying to understand.

The globe-ship was some five-hundred thousand miles out from Earth when the size-change of the weird little vehicle began. It came to Lee with a sudden shock to his senses, his head reeling, and a tingling within him as though every fibre of his being were suddenly stimulated into a new activity.

"Well, my Gawd," Vivian gasped. "What're they doin' to us now?"

The three of them had been warned by a voice through the doorslide, so that they sat together on one of the couches, waiting for what would happen.

"This—I wish they wouldn't do it," Franklin muttered. "Damn them—I want to get out of here."

Fear seemed to be Franklin's chief emotion now—fear and a petty sense of personal outrage that all this could be done to him against his will. Often, when Lee and the girl were at the window, Franklin had sat brooding, staring at his feet.

"Easy," Lee said. "It evidently won't hurt us. We're started in size-change. The globe, and everything in it, is getting larger."

Weird. The grey metal walls of the room were glowing now with some strange current which suffused them. The starlight from the window-lens mingled with an opalescent sheen from the glowing walls. It was like an aura, bathing the room—an aura which seemed to penetrate every smallest cell-particle of Lee's body—stimulating it. . . .

Size-change! Vaguely, Lee could fathom how it was accomplished; his mind went back to many scientific articles he had read on the theory of it—only theory, those imaginative scientific pedants had considered it; and now it was a reality upon him! He recalled the learned phrases the writers had used. . . . The *state of matter*. In all the Universe, the inherent factors which govern the state of matter yield most readily to a change. An electronic charge—a current perhaps akin to, but certainly not identical with electricity, would change the state of all organic and inorganic substances . . . a rapid duplication of the fundamental entities within the electrons—and electrons themselves, so unsubstantial—mere whirlpools of nothingness!

A rapid duplication of the fundamental whirlpools — that would add size. The complete substance—with shape unaltered —would grow larger.

All just theory, but here, now, it was brought to an accomplished fact. Within himself, Lee could feel it. But as yet, he could not see it. The glowing room and everything in it was so weirdly luminous, there was no alteration in shape. These objects, the figure of Vivian beside him, and the pallid frightened Franklin, relative to each other

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they were no different from before. And the vast panorama of starry Universe beyond the lens-window, the immense distances out there, made any size-change as yet unperceivable.

But the size-change had begun, there was no question of it. With his senses steadying, Lee crossed the room. A weird feeling of lightness was upon him; he swayed as he stood before the little line of dials in the wall-recess. Five hundred thousand miles from Earth. More than twice the distance of the Moon. The globe had gone that far with accelerating velocity so that now the pointers marked a hundred thousand miles an hour—out beyond the Moon, heading for the orbit-line of Mars. Now the size-change pointers were stirring. Unit One, the size this globe had been as it rested on Earth, fifty feet in height, and some thirty feet at its mid-section bulge. Already that unit was two, a globe—which, if it were on Earth, would be a hundred feet high. And Lee himself? He would be a giant more than twelve feet tall now. . . . He stood staring at the dials for a moment or two. That little pointer of the first of the size-change dials was creeping around. An acceleration! Another moment and it had touched Unit four. A two hundred foot globe. And Lee, if he had been on Earth, would already be a towering human nearly twenty-five feet in height!

Behind him, he heard Franklin suddenly muttering, "If only I could change without everything else changing! Damn them all—what I could do—"

"You're nuts," Vivian said. "I don't see anything growing bigger—everything here—jus' the same." Her laugh was abruptly hysterical. "This room—you two—you look like ghosts. Say, maybe we're all dead an' don't know it."

Queerly her words sent a shiver through Lee. He turned, stared blankly at her. This weird thing! The electronic light streaming from these walls had a stroboscopic quality. The girl's face was greenish, putty-colored, and her teeth shone phosphorescent.

Maybe we're all dead and don't know it. . . . Lee knew that this thing was a matter of cold, precise, logical science. . . . Yet who shall say but what mysticism is not mingled with science? A thing, which if we understood it thoroughly, would be as logical, as precise as the mathematics of science itself? Death? Who shall say what, of actuality, Death may be. A leaving of the mortal shell? A departure from earthly substance? A new state of being? Surely some of those elements were here now. And, logically, why could there not be a state of being not all Death, but only with some of its elements?

"I—I don't like this," Franklin suddenly squealed. On the couch he sat hunched, trembling. "Something wrong here—Lee—

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damn you Lee—don't you feel it?"

Lee tried to smile calmly. "Feel what?"

"We're not—not alone here," Franklin stammered. "Not just you and Vivian and me—something else is here—something you can't see, but you can almost feel. An' I don't like it—"

A presence. Was there indeed something else here, of which now in this new state of being they were vaguely aware? Something—like a fellow voyager—making this weird journey with them? Lee's heart was so wildly beating that it seemed smothering him.

Unit Ten . . . Twenty . . . a Hundred. . . . With steady acceleration, the lowest size-change pointer was whirling, and the one above it was moving. The globe was five thousand feet high now. And on Earth Lee would have been a monstrous Titan over six hundred feet tall. A globe, and humans in that tremendous size—the very weight of them—in a moment more of this growth—would disarrange the rotation of the Earth on its axis! . . .

And then abruptly Lee found himself envisaging the monstrous globe out here in Space. A thing to disarrange the mechanics of all the Celestial Universe! In an hour or two, with this acceleration of growth, the globe would be a huge meteorite—then an asteroid. . . .

He stared at the distance dials. With the growth had come an immense augmentation of velocity. A hundred thousand miles an hour—that had been accelerated a hundred fold now. Ten million miles an hour. . . . Through the window-lens Lee gazed, mute with awe. The size-change was beginning to show! Far down, and to one side the crescent Earth was dwindling . . . Mars was far away in another portion of its orbit—the Moon was behind the Earth. There were just the myriad blazing giant worlds of the stars—infinitely remote, with vast distances of inky void between them. And now there was a visible movement to the stars! A sort of shifting movement. . . .

An hour. . . . A day. . . . A week. . . . Who shall try and describe what Lee Anthony beheld during that weird outward journey? . . . For a brief time, after they swept past the orbit of Mars, the great planets of Jupiter and Saturn were almost in a line ahead of the plunging, expanding globe. A monstrous thing now—with electronically charged gravity-plates so that it plunged onward by its own repellant force—the repellant force of the great star-field beneath it.

Lee stared at Jupiter, a lead-colored world with its red spot like a monster's single glaring eye. With the speed of light Jupiter was advancing, swinging off to one side with a visible flow of movement, and dropping down

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into the lower void as the globe went past it. Yet, as it approached, visually it had not grown larger. Instead, there was only a steady dwindling. A dwindling of great Saturn, with its gorgeous, luminous rings came next. These approaching planets, seeming to shrink! Because, with Lee's expanding viewpoint, everything in the vast scene was shrinking! Great distances here, in relation to the giant globe, were dwindling! These millions of miles between Saturn and Jupiter had shrunk into thousands. And then were shrinking to hundreds.

Abruptly, with a startled shock to his senses, Lee's viewpoint changed. Always before he had instinctively conceived himself to be his normal six foot earthly size. The starry Universe was vast beyond his conception. And in a second now, that abruptly was altered. He conceived the vehicle as of actuality it was—a globe as large as the ball of Saturn itself! And simultaneously he envisaged the present reality of Saturn. Out in the inky blackness it hung—not a giant ringed world millions of miles away, but only a little ringed ball no bigger than the spaceship—a ringed ball only eight or ten times as big as Lee himself. It hung there for an instant beside them—only a mile or so away perhaps. And as it went past, with both distance and size-change combining now, it shrank with amazing rapidity! A ball only as big as this room. . . . Then no larger than Lee it hung, still seemingly no further away than before. And then in a few minutes more, a mile out there in the shrinking distance, it was a tiny luminous point, vanishing beyond his vision.

Uranus, little Neptune—Pluto, almost too far away in its orbit to be seen—all of them presently were dwindled and gone. Lee had a glimpse of the Solar system, a mere bunch of lights. The Sun was a tiny spot of light, holding its little family of tiny planets—a mother hen with her brood. It was gone in a moment, lost like a speck of star-dust among the giant starry worlds.

Another day—that is a day as it would have been on Earth. But here was merely a progressing of human existence—a streaming forward of human consciousness. The Light-year dial pointers were all in movement. By Earth standards of size and velocity, long since had the globe's velocity reached and passed the speed of light. Lee had been taught—his book-learning colored by the Einstein postulates—that there could be no speed greater than the speed of light—by Earth standards—perhaps, yes. The globe—by comparison with its original fifty-foot earth-size—might still be traveling no more than a few hundred thousand miles an hour. But this monster—a thing now as big as the whole Solar System d o u b t l e s s — was speeding through a light-year in a moment!

Futile figures! The human

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mind can grasp nothing of the vastness of inter-stellar space. To Lee it was only a shrinking inky void—an emptiness crowded with whirling little worlds all dwindling . . . This crowded space! Often little points of star-dust had come whirling at the globe—colliding, bursting into pin-points of fire. Each of them might have been bigger than the Earth.

There was a time when it seemed that beneath the globe all the tiny stars were shrinking into one lens-shaped cluster. The Inter-stellar Universe—all congealed down there into a blob, and everywhere else there was just nothingness . . . But then little distant glowing nebulae were visible—luminous, floating rings, alone in the emptiness . . . Distant? One of them drifted past, seemingly only a few hundred feet away—a luminous little ring of star-dust. The passage of the monstrous globe seemed to hurl it so that like a blown smoke ring it went into chaos, lost its shape, and vanished.

Then at last all the blobs—each of them, to Earth-size conception, a monstrous Universe—all were dwindled into one blob down to one side of Lee's window. And then they were gone . . .

Just darkness now. Darkness and soundless emptiness. But as he stared at intervals through another long night of his human consciousness, Lee seemed to feel that the emptiness out there was dwindling—a finite emptiness. He noticed, presently, that the size-change pointers had stopped their movement; the ultimate size of the globe had been reached. The figures of the Light-year dials were meaningless to his comprehension. The velocity was meaningless. And now another little set of dials were in operation. A thousand—something—of distance. There was a meaningless word which named the unit. A thousand Earth-miles, if he had been in his former size? The pointer marked nine hundred in a moment. Was it, perhaps, the distance now from their destination?

Vivian was beside him. "Lee, what's gonna happen to us? Won't this come to an end some time? Lee—you won't let anybody hurt me?"

She was like a child, almost always clinging to him now. And suddenly she said a very strange thing. "Lee, I been thinkin'—back there on Earth I was doin' a lot of things that maybe were pretty rotten—anglin' for his money for instance—an' not carin' much what I had to do to get it." She gestured at the sullen Franklin who was sitting on the couch. "You know—things like that. An' I been thinkin'—you suppose, when we get where we're goin' now, that'll be held against me?"

What a queer thing to say! She was like a child—and so often a child has an insight into

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that which is hidden from those more mature!

"I—don't know," Lee muttered.

From the couch, Franklin looked up moodily. "Whispering about me again? I know you are—damn you both. You and everybody else here."

"We're not interested in you," Vivian said.

"Oh, you're not? Well you were, back on Earth. I'm not good enough for you now, eh? He's better—because he's big—big and strong—that the idea? Well if I ever had the chance—"

"Don't be silly," Lee said.

The sullen Franklin was working himself into a rage. Lee seemed to understand Franklin better now. A weakling. Inherently, with a complex of inferiority, the vague consciousness of it lashing him into baffled anger.

"You, Anthony," Franklin burst out, "don't think you've been fooling me. You can put it over that fool girl, but not me. I'm onto you."

"Put what over?" Lee said mildly.

"That you don't know anything about this affair or these men who've got us—you don't know who they are, do you?"

"No. Do you?" Lee asked.

Franklin jumped to his feet. "Don't fence with me. By God, if I was bigger I'd smash your head in. They abducted us, because they wanted you. That fellow said as much near the start of this damned trip. They won't talk—afraid I'll find out. And you can't guess what it's all about! The hell you can't."

Lee said nothing. But there was a little truth in what Franklin was saying, of course. . . . Those things that the dying old Anna Green had told him—surely this weird voyage had some connection.

He turned away; went back to the window. There was a sheen now. A vague outline of something vast, as though the darkness were ending at a great wall that glowed a little.

It seemed, during the next time-interval, as though the globe might have turned over, so that now it was dropping down upon something tangible. Dropping — floating down — with steadily decreasing velocity, descending to a Surface. The sheen of glow had expanded until now it filled all the lower hemisphere of darkness—a great spread of surface visually coming up. Then there were things to see, illumined by a faint half-light to which color was coming; a faint, pastel color that seemed a rose-glow.

"Why—why," Vivian murmured, "say, it's beautiful, ain't it? It looks like fairyland—or Heaven. It does—don't it, Lee?"

"Yes," Lee murmured. "Like—like—"

The wall-slide rasped. The voice of one of their captors said, "We will arrive soon. We can trust you—there must be no fighting?"

"You can trust us," Lee said.

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It was dark in the little curving corridor of the globe, where with silent robed figures around them, they stood while the globe gently landed. Then they were pushed forward, out through the exit port.

The new realm. The World Beyond. What was it? To Lee Anthony then came the feeling that there was a precise scientific explanation of it, of course, And yet, beyond all that pedantry of science, he seemed to know that it was something else, perhaps a place that a man might mould by his dreams. A place that would be what a man made of it, from that which was within himself.

Solemn with awe he went with his companions slowly down the incline.

CHAPTER III

Realm of Mystery

"WE wish nothing of you," the man said, "save that you accept from us what we have to offer. You are hungry. You will let us bring you food."

It was a simple rustic room to which they had been brought —a room in a house seemingly of plaited straw. Crude furnishings were here—table and chairs of Earth fashion, padded with stuffed mats. Woven matting was on the floor. Through a broad latticed window the faint rose-light outside—like a soft pastel twilight—filtered in, tinting the room with a gentle glow. Thin drapes at the window stirred in a breath of breeze—a warm wind from the hills, scented with the vivid blooms which were everywhere.

It had been a brief walk from the space-globe. Lee had seen what seemed a little village stretching off among the trees. There had been people crowding to see the strangers—men, women and children, in simple crude peasant garb—brief garments that revealed their pink-white bodies. They babbled with strange unintelligible words, crowding forward until the robed men from the globe shoved them away.

It was a pastoral, peaceful scene—a little country-side drowsing in the warm rosy twilight. Out by the river there were fields where men stood at their simple agricultural implements—stood at rest, staring curiously at the commotion in the village.

And still Lee's captors would say nothing, merely drew them forward, into this room. Then all of them left, save one. He had doffed his robe now. He was an old man, with long grey-white hair to the base of his neck. He stood smiling. His voice, with the English words queerly pronounced, was gentle, but with a firm finality of command.

"My name is Arkoh," he said. "I am to see that you are made comfortable. This house is yours. There are several rooms, so that you may do in them as you wish."

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"Thank you," Lee said. "But you can certainly understand—I have asked many questions and never had any answers. If you wish to talk to me alone—"

"That will come presently. There is no reason for you to be worried—"

"We're not worried," Franklin burst out. "We're fed up with this highhanded stuff. You'll answer questions now. What I demand to know is why—"

"Take it easy," Lee warned.

Franklin had jumped to his feet. He flung off Lee's hand. "Don't make me laugh. I know you're one of them—everything about you is a fake. You got us into this—"

"So? You would bring strife here from your Earth?" Arkoh's voice cut in, like a knife-blade cleaving through Franklin's bluster. "That is not permissible. Please do not make it necessary that there should be violence here." He stood motionless. But before his gaze Franklin relaxed into an incoherent muttering.

"Thank you," Arkoh said. "I shall send you the food." He turned and left the room.

Vivian collapsed into a chair. She was trembling. "Well—my Gawd—what is all this? Lee—that old man with his gentle voice—he looked like if you crossed him you'd be dead. Not that he'd hurt you—it would be—would be something else—"

"You talk like an ass," Franklin said. "You've gone crazy—and I don't blame you—this damned weird thing. For all that old man's smooth talk, we're just prisoners here. Look outside that window—"

It was a little garden, drowsing in the twilight. A man stood watching the window. And as Lee went to the lattice, he could see others, like guards outside.

The man who brought their simple food was a stalwart fellow in a draped garment of brown plaited fibre. His black hair hung thick about his ears. He laid out the food in silence.

"What's *your* name?" Franklin demanded.

"I am Groff."

"And you won't talk either, I suppose? Look here, I can make it worth your while to talk."

"Everyone has all he needs here. There is nothing that you need give us."

"Isn't there? You just give me a chance and I'll show you. No one has all he needs— or all he wants."

Groff did not answer. But as he finished placing the food, and left the room, it seemed to Lee that he shot a queer look back at Franklin. A look so utterly incongruous that it was startling. Franklin saw it and chuckled.

"Well, at least there's one person here who's not so damn weird that it gives you the creeps."

"You don't know what you're talking about," Lee said. With sudden impulse he lowered his voice. "Franklin, listen—there

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are a few things that perhaps I can tell you. Things that I can guess—that Vivian senses—"

"I don't want to hear your explanation. It would be just a lot of damn lies anyway."

"All right. Perhaps it would. We'll soon know, I imagine."

"Let's eat," Vivian said. "I'm hungry, even if I am scared."

To Lee it seemed that the weird mystery here was crowding upon them. As though, here in this dim room, momentous things were waiting to reveal themselves. A strange emotion was upon Lee Anthony. A sort of tense eagerness. Certainly it was not fear. Certainly it seemed impossible that there could be anything here of which he should be afraid. Again his mind went back to old Anna Green and what she had told him of his grandfather. How far away—how long ago that had been. . . . And yet, was Anna Green far away now? Something of her had seemed always to be with him on that long, weird voyage, from the infinite smallness and pettiness of Earth to this realm out beyond the stars. And more than ever now, somehow Lee seemed aware of her presence here in this quiet room. Occultism? He had always told himself that surely he was no mystic. A practical fellow, who could understand science when it was taught him, but certainly never could give credence to mysticism. The dead are dead, and the living are alive; and between them is a gulf —an abyss of nothingness.

Now he found himself wondering. Were all those people on Earth who claimed to feel the presence of dead loved ones near them? Were those people just straining their fancy—just comforting themselves with what they wished to believe? Or was the scoffer himself the fool? And if that could be so, on Earth, why could not this strange realm be of such a quality that an awareness of those who have passed from life would be the normal thing? Who shall say that the mysteries of life and death are unscientific? Was it not rather that they embraced those gaps of science not yet understood? Mysteries which, if only we could understand them, would be mysteries no longer?

Lee had left the table and again was standing at the latticed window, beyond which the drowsing little garden lay silent, and empty now. The guard who had been out here had moved further away; his figure was a blob near a flowered thicket at the house corner. And suddenly Lee was aware of another figure. There was a little splashing fountain near the garden's center—a rill of water which came down a little embankment and splashed into a pool where the rose light shimmered on the ripples.

The figure was sitting at the edge of the pool—a slim young girl in a brief dress like a drape upon her. She sat, half reclining on the bank by the shimmering water, with her long hair flow-

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ing down over her shoulders and a lock of it trailing in the pool. For a moment he thought that she was gazing into the water. Then as the light which tinted her graceful form seemed to intensify, he saw that she was staring at him.

It seemed as though both of them, for that moment, were breathless with a strange emotion awakened in them by the sight of each other. And then slowly the girl rose to her feet. Still gazing at Lee, she came slowly forward with her hair dangling, framing her small oval face. The glow in the night-air tinted her features. It was a face of girlhood, almost mature — a face with wonderment on it now.

He knew that he was smiling; then, a few feet from the window she stopped and said shyly:

"You are Lee Anthony?"

"Yes."

"I am Aura. When you have finished eating, I am to take you to him."

"To him?"

"Yes. The One of Our Guidance. He bade me bring you." Her soft voice was musical; to her, quite obviously, the English was a foreign tongue.

"I'm ready," Lee said. "I'm finished."

One of her slim bare arms went up with a gesture. From the corner of the little house the guard there turned, came inside. Lee turned to the room. The guard entered. "You are to come," he said.

"So we just stay here, prisoners," Franklin muttered. He and Vivian were blankly staring as Lee was led away.

Then in a moment he was alone beside the girl who had come for him. Silently they walked out into the glowing twilight, along a little woodland path with the staring people and the rustic, nestling dwellings blurring in the distance behind them. A little line of wooded hills lay ahead. The sky was like a dark vault—empty. The pastel light on the ground seemed inherent to the trees and the rocks; it streamed out like a faint radiation from everywhere. And then, as Lee gazed up into the abyss of the heavens, suddenly it seemed as though very faintly he could make out a tiny patch of stars. Just one small cluster, high overhead.

"The Universe you came from," Aura said.

"Yes." The crown of her tresses as she walked beside him was at his shoulder. He gazed down at her. "To whom are you taking me? It seems that I could guess--"

"I was told not to talk of that."

"Well, all right. Is it far?"

"No. A little walk — just to that nearest hill."

Again they were silent. "My Earth," he said presently, "do you know much about it?"

"A little. I have been told."

"It seems so far away to me now."

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She gazed up at him. She was smiling. "Is it? To me it seems quite close." She gestured. "Just up there. It seemed far to you, I suppose—that was because you were so small, for so long, coming here."

Like a man the size of an ant, trying to walk ten miles. Of course, it would be a monstrous trip. But if that man were steadily to grow larger, as he progressed he would cover the distance very quickly.

"Well," Lee said, "I suppose I can understand that. You were born here, Aura?"

"Yes. Of course."

"Your world here—what is it like?"

She gazed up at him as though surprised. "You have seen it. It is just a simple little place. We have not so many people here in the village, and about that many more—those who live in the hills close around here."

"You mean that's all? Just this village? Just a few thousand people?"

"Oh there are others, of course. Other groups—like ours, I guess—out in the forests—everywhere in all the forests, maybe." Her gesture toward the distant, glowing, wooded horizons was vague. "We have never tried to find out. Why should we? Wherever they are, they have all that they need or want. So have we."

The thing was so utterly simple. He pondered it. "And you—you're very happy here?"

Her wide eyes were childlike. "Why yes. Of course. Why not? Why should not everyone be happy?"

"Well," he said, "there are things—"

"Yes. I have heard of them. Things on your Earth—which the humans create for themselves—but that is very silly. We do not have them here."

Surely he could think of no retort to such childlike faith. Her faith. How horribly criminal it would be to destroy it. A priceless thing—human happiness to be created out of the faith that it was the normal thing. He realized that his heart was pounding, as though now things which had been dormant within him all his life were coming out—clamoring now for recognition.

And then, out of another silence he murmured. "Aura—you're taking me to my grandfather, aren't you? He came here from Earth—and then he sent back there to get me?"

"Yes," she admitted. "So you know it? But I was instructed to—"

"All right. We won't talk of it. And he's told you about me?"

"Yes," she agreed shyly. She caught her breath as she added, "I have been—waiting for you—a long time." Shyly she gazed up at him. The night-breeze had blown her hair partly over her face. Her hand brushed it away so that her gaze met his. "I hoped you would be, well, like you are," she added.

"Oh," he said awkwardly. "Well—thanks."

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"And you," she murmured out of another little silence, "you—I hope I haven't disappointed you. I am the way you want—like you wished—"

What a weird thing to say! He smiled. "Not ever having heard of you, Aura, I can't exactly say that I—"

He checked himself. Was she what he had wished? Why yes—surely he had been thinking of her—in his dreams, all his life vaguely picturing something like this for Lee Anthony. . . .

"I guess I have been thinking of you," he agreed. "No, you haven't disappointed me, Aura. You—you are—"

He could find no words to say it. "We are almost there," she said. "He will be very happy to have you come. He is a very good man, Lee. The one, we think, of the most goodness—and wiseness, to guide us all—"

The path had led them up a rocky defile, with gnarled little trees growing between the crags. Ahead, the hillside rose up in a broken, rocky cliff. There was a door, like a small tunnel entrance. A woman in a long white robe was by the door.

"He is here," Aura said. "Young Anthony."

"You go in."

Silently they passed her. The tunnel entrance glowed with the pastel radiance from the rocks. The radiance was a soft blob of color ahead of them.

"You will find that he cannot move now," Aura whispered. "You will sit by his bed. And talk softly."

"You mean—he's ill?"

"Well—what you would call paralysis. He cannot move. Only his lips—his eyes. He will be gone from us soon, so that then he can only be unseen. A Visitor—"

Her whisper trailed off. Lee's heart was pounding, seeming to thump in his throat as Aura led him silently forward. It was a draped, cave-like little room. Breathless, Lee stared at a couch—a thin old figure lying there—a frail man with white hair that framed his wrinkled face. It was a face that was smiling, its sunken, burning eyes glowing with a new intensity. The lips moved; a faint old voice murmured:

"And you—you are Lee?"

"Yes—grandfather—"

He went slowly forward and sat on the bedside.

CHAPTER IV

Mad Giant

TO LEE, after a moment, his grandfather seemed not awe-inspiring, but just a frail old man, paralyzed into almost complete immobility, lying here almost pathetically happy to have his grandson at last with him. An old man, with nothing of the mystic about him—an old man who had been—unknown to the savants of his Earth—perhaps the greatest scientist among them. Quietly, with pride welling in him, Lee held the wasted,

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numbed hand of his grandfather and listened. . . .

Phineas Anthony, the scientist. After many years of research, spending his own private fortune, he had evolved the secret of size-change—solved the intricate problems of anti-gravitational spaceflight; and combining the two, had produced that little vehicle.

A man of science; and perhaps more than that. As old Anna Green had said, perhaps he was a man inspired—a man, following his dreams, his convictions, convinced that somewhere in God's great creation of things that are, there must be an existence freed of those things by which Man himself so often makes human life a tortured hell.

"And Something led me here, Lee," the gentle old voice was saying. "Perhaps not such a coincidence. On this great Inner Surface of gentle light and gentle warmth—with Nature offering nothing against which one must strive—there must be many groups of simple people like these. They have no thought of evil—there is nothing—no one, to teach it to them. If I had not landed here, I think I would have found much the same thing almost anywhere else on the Inner Surface."

"The Inner Surface? I don't understand, grandfather."

A conception—a reality here—that was numbing in its vastness. This was the concave, inner surface, doubtless deep within the atom of some material substance. A little empty Space here, surrounded by solidity.

"And that—" Lee murmured, "then that little space is our Inter-Stellar abyss?"

"Yes. Of course. The stars, as we call them—from here you could call them tiny particles—like electrons whirling. All of them in this little void. With good eyesight, you can sometimes see them there—"

"I did."

And to this viewpoint which Lee had now—so gigantic, compared to Earth—all the Inter-Stellar universe was a void here of what old Anthony considered would be perhaps eight or ten thousand miles. A void, to Lee now, was itself of no greater volume than the Earth had been to him before!

Silently he pondered it. This Inner Surface—not much bigger, to him now, than the surface of the Earth is to its humans. . . . Suddenly he felt small—infinitely tiny. Out here beyond the stars, he was only within the atom of something larger, a human, partly on his way—emerging—outward—

It gave him a new vague conception. As though now, because he was partly emerged, the all-wise Creator was giving him a new insight. Surely in this simple form of existence humans were totally unaware of what evil could be. Was not this a higher form of life than down there on his tiny Earth?

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The conception numbed him with awe . . .

"You see, Lee, I have been looking forward to having you become a man—to having you here," old Anthony was saying. As he lay, so utterly motionless, only his voice, his face, his eyes, semed alive. It was an amazingly expressive old face, radiant, transfigured. "I shall not be here long. You see? And when I have—gone on—when I can only come back here as a Visitor—like Anna Green, you have been aware of her, Lee?"

"Yes, grandfather. Yes, I think I have."

"The awareness is more acute, here, than it was back on Earth. A very comforting thing, Lee. I was saying—I want you here. These people, so simple—you might almost think them childlike—they need someone to guide them. The one who did that—just as I came, was dying. Maybe—maybe that is what led me here. So now I need you."

It welled in Lee with an awe, and a feeling suddenly of humbleness—and of his own inadequacy, so that he murmured,

"But grandfather—I would do my best—but surely—"

"I think it will be given you—the ability—and I've been thinking, Lee, if only some time it might be possible to show them on Earth—"

Lee had been aware that he and old Anthony were alone here. When Lee entered, Aura had at once withdrawn. Now, interrupting his grandfather's faint, gentle voice there was a commotion outside the underground apartment. The sound of women's startled cries, and Aura's voice.

Then Aura burst in, breathless, pale, with her hair flying and on her face and in her eyes a terror so incongruous that Lee's heart went cold.

He gasped, "Aura! Aura, what is it?"

"This terrible thing—that man who came with you—that man, Franklin—he talked with Groff. Some evil spell to put upon Groff—it could only have been that—"

Lee seized her. "What do you mean? Talk slower, Groff? The man who served us that meal—"

"Yes, Groff. And two of the men who were to guard there. What that man said to them—did to them—and when old Arkoh found it out he opposed them—" Her voice was drab with stark horror—so new an emotion that it must have confused her, so that now she just stood trembling.

"Child, come here—come here over to me—" Old Anthony's voice summoned her. "Now—talk more slowly—try and think what you want to tell us . . . What happened?"

"Oh—I saw old Arkoh—him whom I love so much—who always has been so good to me—to us all—I saw him lying there on the floor—"

Words so unnatural here that they seemed to reverberate through the little cave-room

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with echoes that jostled and muttered like alien, menacing things which had no right here—and yet, were here.

"You saw him—lying there?" Lee prompted.

"Yes. His throat, with red blood running out of it where they had cut him—and he was dying—he died while I stood there—"

The first murder. A thing so unnatural. Old Anthony stared for an instant mute at the girl who now had covered her face with her hands as she trembled against Lee.

"Killed him?" Lee murmured.

On Anthony's face there was wonderment — disillusion, and then bitterness. "So? This is what comes to us, from Earth?"

Lying so helpless, old Anthony could only murmur that now Lee must do what he could.

"Your own judgement, my son—do what you can to meet this." The sunken, burning eyes of the old man flashed. "If there must be violence here, let it be so. Violence for that which is right."

"Grandfather—yes! That miserable cowardly murderer—"

To meet force, with force. Surely, even in a world of ideals, there is no other way.

With his fists clenched, Lee ran from the cave-room. Frightened women scattered before him at its entrance. Where had Franklin gone? That fellow Groff, and two or three of the guards had gone with him. Cynicism swept Lee; he remembered the look Groff had flung at Franklin. Even here in this realm—because it was peopled by humans—evil passions could brood. Groff indeed must have been planning something, and he had seen in Franklin a ready helper—a man from Earth, whom Groff very well may have thought would be more resourceful, more experienced in the ways of violence than himself.

This realm where everyone had all of happiness that he could want! Human perfection of existence. A savage laugh of irony was within Lee as he thought of it. No one had ever held out the offer of more than perfection to these people. But Franklin evidently had done it —playing upon the evil which must lie within every living thing, no matter how latent it may be. Awakening in those guards the passion of cupidity—desire for something better than they had now.

What had happened to Vivian? Out in the rose-light dimness, a little way down the path, Lee found himself staring off toward the forest where the village lay nestled. Voices of the frightened people came wafting through the night silence.

"Lee—Lee—"

It was Aura behind him, running after him. "Lee—wait—I belong with you. You know that—"

He gripped her. "That girl from Earth—that Vivian—she

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was with Franklin. What happened to her?"

"She went. He took her—"

"She went—voluntarily?"

"Yes. The people saw her running out with Franklin, and Groff and the other men. Oh, Lee—what—what are you going to do?"

"I don't know." He stood for a moment dazed, confused—panting, his fingers twitching. If only he could get a grip on Franklin's throat. And so Vivian went too! That was a laugh—girl of the streets, pretty worthless, on Earth. But here—she had seemed to sense what this realm could mean.

"Aura, where would Groff be likely to go?"

"Go? Why—why I do remember, Groff often went up into the hills. He never said why?"

"Would they have any weapons?"

"Weapons?" Her eyes widened as though for a second she did not comprehend. "Weapons? You mean—instruments with which to kill people? No—how could there be? But a knife can kill. A knife cut old Arkoh's throat. We have knives—in the houses—and knives that are used for the harvests—"

She had turned to gaze out toward the glowing hills . . . "Oh, Lee—look—"

Numbed, with their breath catching in their throats, they stared. Out by the hills a man's figure rose up—monstrous, gigantic figure.

Franklin! He stood beside the little hill, with a hand on its top, his huge bulk dwarfing it! Franklin, a titan, his head and shoulders looming monstrously against the inky blackness of the sky!

CHAPTER V

Combat of Titans

"AURA, you think you know where Groff may have gone—those times he went out into the hills?"

"Yes. I think so. Lee—that giant, I think now I understand what must have happened."

The giant shape of Franklin, a mile or two from them, had stood for a moment and then had receded, vanished momentarily as he moved backward behind the hills. Lee and Aura, stunned, still stood beside the little rocky path. Lee's mind was a turmoil of confusion, with only the knowledge that he must do something now, quickly. There were no weapons here in this peaceful little realm. Four or five of these madmen villians—what need had they of weapons? The monstrous power of size. The thought of it struck at Lee with a chill that seemed turning his blood to ice. The monster that Franklin had become—with a size like that he could scatter death with his naked hands.

"I remember now," Aura was gasping. "There was a time when your grandfather was working on his science. Groff was

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helping him then. Your grandfather taught Groff much."

"Working at what?"

"It was never said. Then your grandfather gave it up—he had decided it would not be wise here."

Some individual apparatus, with the size-change principle of the space-globe? And Groff had gotten the secret. An abnormality here—Groff with the power of evil latent within him, tempted by this opportunity. What could he have hoped to accomplish? Of what use to him would it be to devastate this little realm? Bitter irony swept Lee. Of what use was vast personal power to anyone? Those madmen of Earth's history, with their lust for conquest—of what use could the conquest be to them? And yet they had plunged on.

He realized that with Groff there could have been a wider field of conquest. Groff had heard much of Earth. With the power of size here, he could master this realm; then seize the space-globe. Go with it to Earth. Why, in a gigantic size there, he and a few villainous companions could master the Earth-world. A mad dream indeed, but Lee knew it was a lustful possibility matched by many in Earth's history.

And then Franklin had come here. Franklin, with his knowledge of Earth which Groff would need. Franklin, with his inherent feeling of inferiority—his groping desire for the strength and power of size. What an opportunity for Franklin!

Lee heard himself saying out of the turmoil of his thoughts: "Then, Aura—out there in the hills they've got some apparatus, of course, which—"

His words were stricken away. From somewhere in the glowing dimness near at hand there was a groan. A gasping, choking groan; and the sound of something falling.

"Lee—over there—" Aura's whispered words were drab with horror.

A figure which had been staggering among the rocks near them, had fallen. They rushed to it. Vivian! She was trying to drag herself forward. Her hair, streaming down in a sodden mass, was matted with blood. Her pallid face was blood-smeared. Her neck and throat were a welter of crimson horror. Beside her on the ground lay a strange-looking apparatus of grids and wires—a metal belt—a skeleton helmet. . . . She was gripping it with a blood-smeared hand, dragging it with her.

"Vivian—Vivian—"

"Oh—you, Lee? Thank Gawd I got to you—"

Her elbows gave way; her head and shoulders sank to the rock. Faintly gasping, with blood-foam at her livid lips, she lay motionless. But her glazing eyes gazed up at Lee, and she was trying to smile.

"I went with them—that damned Franklin—he thought I

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was as bad as him—" Her faint words were barely audible as he bent down to her. "Just want to tell you, Lee—you're perfectly swell—I guess I fell for you, didn't I? That's over now—just wanted you to know it anyway. There's one of the damned mechanisms they've got—"

"Where are they, Vivian?"

"A cave, not very far from here—down that little ravine—just ahead—they're in there—four or five of them, getting ready to—" Blood was rattling in her throat, choking her. She tried, horribly, to cough. And then she gasped:

"I stole this mechanism. He—Franklin—he caught me—slashed me. He taught I was dead, I guess—but—when he had gone, I got this mechanism—trying to get to you—"

Her choking, rattling breath again gave out. For a moment she lay with a paroxysm of death twitching her. And then, very faintly she gasped:

"Sort of nice—I was able to do one good thing—anyhow. I'm glad of that—"

The paroxysm ended in a moment. Her white lips were still trying to smile as the light went out of her eyes and she was gone. Trembling, Lee stood up, with the mute, white-faced Aura clinging to him. It was fairly obvious how the weird mechanism should be adjusted—anklets, the skeleton helmet of electrodes, the belt around his waist, with its grids, tiny dials and curved battery box. In a moment he stood with the wires strung from his head, to wrist, ankles and waist. There seemed but one little control switch that would slide over a metal arc of intensity contacts.

"Oh, Lee—what—what are you going to do—?" Aura stood white with terror.

"She said—four or five of them in a cave near here—perhaps they haven't yet gotten large—"

Down in a little ravine Lee found himself running forward in the luminous darkness. He called back, "Aura—you stay where you are—you hide, until it's over—"

Then, in the turmoil of his mind, there was no thought of the girl. There was only the vision of old Anthony lying back there so helpless—his burning eyes bitter with this thing which had so horribly come to his little realm. To meet force with force was the only answer.

It was not Lee's plan to increase his size for a moment now. By doing that, almost at once he would be discovered. And perhaps there were still four or five of the murderers, still not giants, in a cave nearby.

The dim rocky ravine, heavy with shadows, led downward. He came to a tunnel opening, advancing more cautiously now. And then, as he turned an angle ahead of him, down a little subterranean declivity a luminous cave was visible. Groff's hideout. At one of its entrances here Lee

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stood for an instant gasping. The five men were here—Groff and four of his villainous companions.

The five bodies lay strewn—horribly mangled. And the wreckage of their size-change mechanisms was strewn among them.

So obvious, what had happened! Franklin had been the first to get large. And at once he had turned on them. Franklin, the weakling who dared not have any rivalry! And now Franklin was outside, out in the hills, a raging, murderous monster. For a moment, in the grisly shambles of the little cave Lee stood transfixed. Then his hand was fumbling at his belt. He shoved the small switch-lever.

There was a shock—a humming—a reeling of his senses. It was akin to what he had felt on the space-globe, but stronger, more intense now. For an instant he staggered, confused. The wires strung on him were glowing; he could feel their heat. Weird luminous opalescence streamed from them—it bathed him—strange electrolite radiance that permeated every minute fibre of his being.

With his head steadying, Lee suddenly was aware of movement all about him. The dim outlines of the cave-room were shrinking with a creeping, crawling movement. Cave-walls and roof all shrinking, dwindling, drawing down upon him. Under his feet the rocky ground seemed hitching forward.

This little cave! In a moment while he stood shocked into immobility, the cave was a tiny cell. Down by his feet the gruesome mangled corpses were the size of children. The cave-roof bumped his head. He must get out of here! The realization stabbed him. Why, in another moment or two these dark walls would close upon him! Then with instant changing viewpoint he saw the true actuality. He was a growing giant, crouching here underground—a giant who would be crushed, mangled by his own monstrous growth.

Lee turned, staggered into the little tunnel, shoved his way out. The walls pressed him; they seemed in a moment to close after him as he gained the outer glowing darkness. . . . There was only a narrow slit in the dwindling cliff to mark the tunnel entrance. Lee had the wits to crouch in a fairly open space as he stared at the dwindling trees, the little hills, all shrinking. Franklin must be around here somewhere. Franklin doubtless would see him in a moment.

And then as Lee rose up, Franklin saw him. Lee put a hand on one of the little hills at his waist, vaulted it so that he faced Franklin with what seemed no more than a hundred feet between them. For that second Frankiln was transfixed. Amazement swept his face. His muttering was audible:

"Why—why—what's this—"

An adversary had come to

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challenge his power. As Lee bounded forward, on Franklin's face while he stood transfixed, there was wonderment—disappointment—sudden instinctive fear—and then wild rage. He stooped; seized a boulder, hurled it at the oncoming Lee. It missed; and then Lee was on him, seizing him.

Franklin's body had not been enlarging, but as he saw Lee coming, his hand had flung his switch. They gripped each other now, swaying, locked together, staggering. Franklin still was more than head and shoulders above Lee. His huge arms, with amazing power in them, bent Lee backward. He stumbled, went down with Franklin on him. "Got you! Damn you," he said.

His giant hands gripped Lee's throat, but Lee was aware that his own body was enlarging faster than Franklin's, upon which the size-current had only now started to act. If Lee could only resist—just a little bit longer! His groping hands beside him on the ground seized a rock. Monstrous strangling fingers were at this throat—his breath was gone, his head roaring. Then he was aware that he had seized a rock and struck it up into Franklin's face. For a second the hands at Lee's throat relaxed. He gulped in air, desperately broke free and staggered to his feet.

But Franklin was up as quickly. The tiny forest trees crackled under Lee's tread as again he hurled himself viciously on his antagonist. . . .

At the head of the distant ravine, the numbed Aura crouched alone, staring out at the hills with mute horror—staring at the two monstrous giants slugging it out. Franklin was the larger. She saw Lee rise up, and with a hand on one of the hills, vault over it. Giants that loomed against the sky as they fronted each other and then crashed together, went down.

Lee was underneath! Dear God—

Two monstrous bodies—Lee was lying with a ridge of crags under his shoulders. . . . Franklin's voice was a blurred roar of triumph in the distance. Then she saw Lee's groping hand come up with a monstrous fifty foot boulder. He crashed it home.

They were up again. Their giant staggering lunges had carried them five miles from her. They were almost the size of fighting titans. The blurred distant shapes of them were silhouettes against the glow of the sky. The forest out there was crackling under their tread . . . a blurred roar of breaking, mangled trees. . . .

It was just a few seconds while Aura stared, but each second was an eternity of horror. Then one of the monstrous figures was toppling. A great boulder had crashed on Franklin's head; he had broken loose, staggering while Lee jumped backward and crouched.

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For just a second the towering shape of the stricken Franklin loomed up in the sky. And then it fell crashing forward. A swift-flowing stream was there, and the body fell across it—blocking the water which dammed up, then turned aside and went roaring off through the mangled forest.

Lee, again in his former size, sat at old Anthony's bedside, with Aura behind him. The news of the combat out there against the sky had come to Anthony—the excitement of it, too much for his faltering old heart. . . .

"But you will be all right, grandfather. The thing is over now."

"Yes. All right—of course, Lee. Just a visitor here—and you will take my place—"

He lay now—as old Anna Green had been that night—just on the brink. "Lee, listen to me—those mechanisms—the space-globe—Lee, I realize now there is no possibility that we could help Earth—and surely it could only bring us evil here. What we have found here—don't you see, back on Earth each man must create it for himself. Within himself: He could do that, if he chose. And so you—you must disconnect us—forever—"

"Yes, grandfather—"

"And I—guess that is all—"

For some time he seemed to hover on the brink, while Lee and Aura, sitting hand in hand, silently watched him. And then he was gone.

The last of the mechanisms irrevocably was smashed. The little line of vacuums and tubes of the space-globe's mechanisms went up into a burst of opalescent light under Lee's grim smashing blows.

Then silently he went outside and joined Aura. Behind them, down the declivity toward the village, the people were gathering. He was silent, his heart pounding with emotion, as he faced them from a little eminence—faced them and heard their shouts, and saw their arms go up to welcome him.

Slowly he and Aura walked down the slope toward his waiting people. And with her by his side, her hand in his, Lee Anthony knew then that he had found fulfillment—the attainment of that which is within every man's heart — man's heritage — those things for which he must never cease to strive.

THE END

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THE RAT RACKET

By DAVID H. KELLER, M.D.

With Dr. Keller's genius for hitting at vital spots every time, he now gives us a brand new idea and an ingenious solution. We hope no racketeers read this story. They might, as a result, cause the police some trouble. Fortunately, however, the racket has a flaw.

RICHARD MOYER, senior partner of the firm of Moyer & Perkins, read that letter over twice before he called in the man who had helped him make the importing of high grade groceries from England a most profitable business for over twenty years.

He simply handed the letter over to Paul Perkins without a word of explanation. The latter read it through and handed it back in equal silence, but the hand that held the letter trembled.

"Just another racket," exclaimed Moyer, finally.

"Looks like it. I suppose we were foolish to start in paying

They were running out through the

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picture. A crazed man tore it from the wall.

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for protection. First our trucks were threatened; then the new building; after that our best customers were bombed, and we had to pay to protect them. Your son was kidnapped—and the police! They even went so far as to advise that we keep on paying—and now this letter! We might as well close out the business. All our profits go toward supporting a gang of criminals who have muscled into every type of American industry."

"On the face of it the letter looks innocent enough," sighed Perkins, as he picked it up and gave it another reading. "Simply says that the rat menace is increasing, cites several business houses where the rodents have done a great deal of damage, and offers to give our warehouses complete protection for five thousand a week. You could show that letter to a hundred police officials and they would laugh at your fears. But I am not laughing. Because that letter was written on the same damaged typewriter that the other letters were written on and those gangsters have not failed to make any of their threats good."

"Suppose we pretend that they are honest, and answer their letter and send them a check for the first week's protection?"

"They will laugh at you and send back the check."

"They may, at that. Then we will give them the cash. In either case, it will give us time to think. I feel that they are only experimenting with us. They are after larger game than five thousand a week. We shall see and hear more of this rat business in a while. Write to them and tell them that we will pay the cash, and put the entire matter in the hands of the Chamber of Commerce. If it does not act soon, the entire city will be in the hands of the gangsters."

The complaint of Moyer & Perkins was only one of a dozen similar ones which reached the Chamber of Commerce that day. In a secluded room of the Manufacturers' Club a dozen wealthy men met day after day, hearing and weighing evidence against a hundred forms of racketeering which was rapidly becoming a terrible and powerful enemy to the varied industries of the Metropolis. Practically every business had been threatened and more than one captain of industry blustered openly, but paid his weekly tribute silently in order to protect his business, family, and home.

Up to this time the usual weapon had been the strong arm man and the bomb. While these were bad enough, they were at least understood. When it came to rats, it was different. Of course, everybody knew something about rats—that they were supposed to be numerous around the river fronts and warehouses—but on the other hand, rats were seldom seen in daylight, and there were many New Yorkers who never saw one.

Not one of the dozen men had been raised on a farm and none

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had served in the trenches during the World War. They did not understand rats, so, they hesitated, and finally simply advised the merchants who had received the rat letters to use their own judgement. As a result, some paid tribute and some did not. There is no evidence to show that those who paid were one hundred per cent free from rats in their warehouses, but within a week there was ample proof that at least three wholesale groceries and one laundry had been invaded overnight by rats in sufficient quantity to cause thousands of dollars' worth of damages. Moyer & Perkins heard the news and decided to pay another five thousand.

The Defense Committee of the Chamber of Commerce was called to an extra meeting at the El Dorado Hotel. The owner of the hotel was one of the Committee, a man who, so far, had taken a very inactive part in its transactions. He did not waste time in giving the reason for the special meeting.

"I was called on the telephone this morning," he explained. "The person at the other end wanted to protect my hotel from rats for the small compensation of twenty-five thousand dollars a week. He referred casually to the three warehouses and one laundry that had been wrecked last week. Right at the present time I have, on an average, twelve hundred guests a night. They are here to be entertained, not to be frightened by rats. But here is the point. If I yield, every other hotel in the city will be placed in a similar position. Three hundred thousand strangers are in the city every day. Suppose that ten hotels were overrun with rats in one week and the fact was circulated in the press? What would that cost the city?

"Better pay it," growled one of the men. He happened to own a hotel. He knew how temperamental was the pleasure-seeking stranger. Singularly, that advice was the only brand given by the rest of the Committee. They seemed strangely unable to offer any remedy except to keep on paying and in every way possible bar unpleasant news from the newspapers.

Inside of next month, fifty-five hotels were paying a weekly tax to the rat racketeers. One small hotel refused, and was at once deluged with an army of rats which drove out guests and employees, killed one old scrub woman and severely injured twenty of the cooks, waiters and porters who received the brunt of the rodent onslaught.

Moyer & Perkins were still paying the five thousand a week when, to their surprise, a visitor dropped into their office and casually suggested that they sell him their business.

"It used to be a good business," explained Moyer.

"It still is," interrupted Perkins. "What my partner means is this. We have our share of trade, but the overhead has be-

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come so heavy that we have not been able to make any money lately."

"That is what I understand," commented the stranger. "In fact, I was sent here by the Chamber of Commerce. They told me you had been paying money for rat protection. That is about the only reason I want to buy your business. Your business is supposed to be worth about two hundred thousand and your real estate as much more. Suppose I give you half a million and advise you to keep quiet about the sale?"

"You mean carry on the business under the old name?" asked Moyer, looking at the prospective buyer earnestly.

"Something like that."

The Englishman shook his head.

"Not and remain in this country! They kidnapped my son. No telling what they will do next, if the policies of the firm are changed. Anything that is done we shall be blamed for, no matter who really owns the business."

"Then, you and your partner take a vacation in Europe. You can afford it. All I am asking for is an exact account of your transactions with these racketeers, so I can have something to work on."

"May I ask what you want to do with the business?" interrogated the Junior Partner, Perkins.

"Certainly. I intend to use it as one of my experimental laboratories for the study of a mammal, known as the *Mus Norvegicus*, called, in common English, the brown rat. He is supposed to have originated from the *Mus Humiliatus* of Central Asia. Now will you gentlemen take the half million?"

"We will!" exclaimed Perkins. "Then may I ask your name?"

"Winifred Willowby."

"Not the one who is reputed to own more United States bonds than any other man in America?" gasped Richard Moyer.

"I won't admit that I do, but I am the man you are thinking about."

"Then I simply cannot understand why you want to mix up in this rat business."

"Simple enough. I am a hundred per cent American. For five generations my people have been born and buried in this city. I own over two hundred million dollars worth of land here. When the dregs of Europe come over to my city and use the rats of Asia to bleed that city white, then I personally protest. I am going to start something. I am not sure what, but when I finish, this city will be practically rat empty and gangster free."

"A large programme, Mr. Willowby," whispered Perkins.

"But I am a large man. Now, suppose I write you gentlemen a check?"

Five minutes later the two partners were alone. Moyer looked at the check, then put it in his pocket, and his hat on his head.

"Suppose we get it cashed?"

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he said to Perkins. "You can do as you please with your half, but I am going to take my family and go back to England. That man Willowby is only half pint size, but his blue eyes look cold to me, and I bet he plays a stiff game of bridge. If he starts fighting those gangsters, I do not want to be caught on the battlefield."

"How about starting a business over in England?" asked Perkins.

"Not a bad idea. I came over here and together we made half a million selling English groceries to Americans. Perhaps we can make a million more selling American groceries to Englishmen."

Winifred Willowby not only bought the grocery business of Moyer & Perkins; he bought a laundry, a small hotel, an apartment house and a theatre. He kept all the old employees, put in a manager, instructed that the weekly tribute should be paid as usual, and then disappeared from New York City.

Ten days later, in Paradise Valley, in the broken country below the Poconos of Pennsylvania, he entertained several men, each an authority in his special line of art or science. They kept the appointment, not being at all sure what it was for, but unable to refuse the invitation which was accompanied in each case with a substantial check. They had all heard of Willowby, but none had ever seen him. No doubt all were rather disappointed at his apparent lack of color and personality. They quickly changed their mind when he started to talk, for there was a man who, when he had something to say, was able to say it briefly and to the point.

"You men are all interested in rats," he began, "and so am I. You have worked with rats in one way or another for a good many years. Perhaps I ought to introduce you to each other. Mr. William Rastell has written the best biological study of rats in the English language. He has done for rats what Beebe did for the pheasant. Now the gentleman next to Mr. Rastell is Mr. Carol Crawford. I doubt if he ever actually saw or willingly handled a rat in all his life, but I am told he knows more about the folklore and traditions of the rat than any other living person. The third of my guests is Professor Wilson. He is the psychologist who has tried to breed different strains of rats, some of superior intelligence and others of the imbecile type. What I want you gentlemen to tell me is why these rats congregate at times in certain buildings of New York City, in such large numbers that they are a serious menace to property and even human life, and, then, as suddenly disappear as they appeared."

"Are they actually doing that?" asked Professor Wilson, who had suddenly become vitally interested in the conversation.

"Suppose they are?" queried Carol Crawford, answering the

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question for Willowby. "That is nothing more than they have done for centuries."

"Do you mean migratory movements?" asked the biologist, Rastell. "Rats have always migrated."

"I mean nothing of the kind," protested Crawford. "I mean their sudden appearance in a town or a building, their remaining there for a short time and then their sudden disappearance. The folklore and fairy tales are full of that sort of thing."

"That is why I asked you to come to this conference, Mr. Crawford," explained Willowby. "There is something peculiar happening in New York at the present time, and it has to do with rats and their actions. In some way rats of New York seem to be under the control of a set of racketeers who are able to force them to enter any building they select. The rats come and go suddenly. It is all over in a little while, but when they are in the building, they do a lot of damage."

Mr. Crawford interruped him.

"I doubt if you use the right word, when you say the rats were forced to enter the building. Perhaps you mean that the rats were by some means placed in such a psychic condition that they wanted to enter the building."

"That brings the matter into my field of research," insisted Professor Wilson. "I doubt the fact that they were forced, but if they wanted to, why that brings up all kinds of interesting questions."

"That is what I am after, gentlemen. I simply want to present the problem to you and have you solve it. I personally am satisfied with one thing. These rats are no different than the rats of five thousand years ago. They are just like the rats of classic Greece and imperial Rome. Maybe Mr. Crawford will tell us how they acted."

The antiquarian fairly beamed as he started to ride his favorite hobby-horse.

"Of course, the story everyone thinks of is the one concerning the Piper of Hamelin. It was in the year 1284. The rats were thick, and the Piper agreed to lead them out of the town for a certain sum. He played a pipe, no doubt some kind of flute, and the rats followed him. When the people refused to pay, he returned on the 26th of June, the feast of Saints John and Paul, and again played on the pipe. This time the children, one hundred and thirty in number, followed him into a cave and were lost. The date is well documented. A number of historians believe that it actually occurred, and on the gate of the town is the statement,

*'CENTUM TER DENOS CUM MAGUS AB URBE PUELLOS DUXERAT ANTE ANNOS CCLXXII CONDITA PORTA FUIT.'**

*When the magician (the Piper) had led the one hundred and thirty children out of the city, two hundred and twenty-two years before the gate was built.

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"The same story is found with variations, in all parts of the world. There is, for example, the story of the wicked Hatto, abbot of Fulda. He was visited by a swarm of rats who killed him. I can give you a dozen variations of that story, but in each of them the rats came and went, suddenly, as Mr. Willowby says they have been doing in New York."

"I should like to see a few examples of this mass movement of rats. I saw a lemming migration in Norway, but that was different," explained Rastell. "It seems to me that if we actually saw one of these nocturnal attacks, we might learn why they wanted to do it."

"He is deadly right," agreed Professor Wilson. "A few actual facts are worth a hundred theories."

"That is why I have asked you to help me," explained the richest man in New York. "I have prepared some experimental stations for your use. I can put you in a grocery warehouse and guarantee that inside of a week you will see more rats than you ever dreamed of. I have a laundry and a small hotel. We can work out the details right now. All I am asking of you is to find out, when the rats come, *why they come* and, once we know that, we can do something to solve this problem."

"The game looks interesting," declared the Professor of rat psychology. "What I am interested in is why the rats do it. I am sure that it is because they want to do it, but are they forced to want to do it? It is a problem that will take a lot of research to solve, but Rastell and I can solve it. With all respects to our friend, Mr. Crawford, I think that he had better stay away and just keep on reading about his little pets. A few thousand vicious rats would be hard for him to deal with."

"I guess you are right," laughed Winifred Willowby, "Crawford and I will stay here and read about it while you two do the actual scientific work. By the way, Crawford, in that story of the Piper, what was given the credit for drawing the rats out of the town?"

"The tune that he played on the pipes!"

"Check and double check. Now I would advise you gentlemen to locate some musical instrument in that warehouse, and if you find one, experiment with it. Of course, you will have to be rather clever to find it. In the first place, the people putting it there will have it under cover and just as soon as the mischief is done they will remove it."

"It is nothing like that," laughed Professor Wilson, almost in scorn. "These are New York rats. It will take more than a little music to lead them from their usual haunts. But Rastell and I will start in at once. Give us the address of the buildings and the authority to use them. How shall we know when the rats are going to come?"

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"They will appear within seven days after you stop the racket money. Suppose we adjourn the meeting? I want a few words in private with Mr. Crawford. You other gentlemen can get all the rest of the details from my secretary. He will arrange your salary and expense account. Good night."

He took Mr. Crawford into his bedroom.

"Do you really believe that story, Crawford?"

"I positively do. And the people believe it. The Piper walked down the Bungen-Strasse and to this day no music is ever played in that street. They even date time in that town from the day the children disappeared."

"Then, there must be something in it. Suppose we go over to Europe and find out something about that tune, the tune that drew the rats out of Hamelin?"

Rastell and Wilson followed out their programme. They went to the grocery warehouse and made a rat survey. There were a few rodents there but not many. Then they issued orders that the weekly payment of five thousand dollars be stopped. After that they spent their nights in the warehouse. On the fifth night the rats came by the thousands. They appeared to be hunting for something, but in the meantime, they ate and soiled whatever came their way. The local cats fought heroically, but were soon killed and eaten. The rats came up from the cellar through the elevator shafts, up the steps, through the cracks in the floor, up and up till they started to run around the roof. Then, at four in the morning, they started to leave, running down the steps in close formation, seemingly panic stricken at their own temerity and anxious only to return to their safe, dark haunts. The two scientists, in their wire observation cage, closed their note book, opened the door of the cage, and started to make a careful search of the building. It revealed nothing but the bones of cats and much spoiled food.

For the next two days they worked carefully through every part of the building, hunting for something to explain the conduct of the rats. They found nothing. All that they were sure of was the fact that the rats had been there, and that they had not come back.

The following week they repeated the experiment in the laundry. The course of events was the same. The payment was refused, then the rats came, devoured and destroyed, stayed a night and left. Nothing was found. They decided to go and have a conference with Winifred Willowby, but he could not be located. The two scientists were left to their own resources. Having no other plausible plan of action, they selected the small hotel for their next experiment. This time they set a hundred wire traps and caught several hundred living rats. These they

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subjected to every known experiment, and at the end were forced to acknowledge that all they had learned left them in ignorance as to why the rats came just for one night in such enormous numbers.

Two months later their employer sent for them. It appeared that he had just returned from Europe. He listened to their story, smiled kindly at their perplexity, suggested that they take a vacation and forget about rats for a while, paid all their bills, and discharged them. He even went so far as to say that he was uninterested in rats, that it had just been a passing hobby and that just at present he was working on other matters. So, he asked them to pass out of his life. But he and Carol Crawford went into the wilds of Pike County and did some experimenting on his own account.

Meantime, things were going from bad to worse in New York City. The rat racketeers were becoming bolder, and started to reach after larger game. There were rumors that the Pennsylvania Railroad was paying to protect its terminal and that the Interurban was being bled white to keep the rats out of the subway. Of course, much of this was rumor and none of it reached the newspapers, but there is no doubt about the fact that eight million people were becoming rat-conscious and rat-afraid. It was growing into a worth-while racket, and those behind it were rapidly acquiring more than riches; they were growing so powerful that they felt able to control the city government.

More than one business tried to resist and more than one business awoke to find that it owned nothing but ruins. Rat protection was worthless when the enemy came by the hundred thousand and even million. The only worth-while defense against the multitudinous enemy was the payment of the weekly tribute, small enough each week, but in the course of the year taking the profits from most of the firms compelled to pay. Within a year the average business in the city was working for the gangsters and content to, at least, be permitted to stay in business.

Then the racket was transferred to other cities, slowly and on a small scale at first; then more boldly. Chicago, Philadelphia and Washington began to feel the pressure. The profits were divided, but always the main share went to New York. For that was where the Big Boys were. And ruling the Big Boys was the Old Man, who was so little known and so seldom seen that his very existence was questioned by some of the smaller gangsters. No one knew how he had obtained his power, but no one was brave enough to deny it. The fact remained that he simply ruled; reigned like a Caesar; dictated like a Napoleon. From back-stage he pulled the wires to make his puppets dance.

It was this man who aroused the interest of Winifred Willow-

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by. In other times, in former generations, in far-passed centuries, they might have ruled Rome together, or split it in two ways over their dying bodies. But in 1935 the short sword had been replaced by the ballot box and civil war by the primary election. Neither man had much that the other craved for, yet both prevented the other from the full enjoyment of life. But it was the blue blooded patrician who at last gave in and secretly asked for an interview.

The conference was held on a fallen log on the shore of Porter's Pond in Pike County, Pa. Someone said that if Mark Hopkins sat on one end of a log and a student on the other end, it was a University; but, with Willowby on one end of the log and the Old Man on the other, it became nothing more than a conspiracy against the existence and the very life of the nation.

It was a strange sight, those two opposites on the log. The rich man, a little over five feet, barely a hundred pounds, with the body of a boy and the face of an angel. At the other end a large man, with the torso of an ape, and the face of a Titan, a man who had conquered by crushing, ruthlessly and devastatingly, all who had dared to oppose him. The two were great men, but they were equally lonely. Their very positions as leaders of their respective societies prevented any fraternizing with their followers.

"I do not want to waste your time, Mr. Consuelo," began Willowby. "We ought to be able to understand each other. You would do nicely if the Federal Government would leave you alone, but it has the peculiar ability of annoying you and interfering with your plans. Am I right?"

"Absolutely! Of course, it does not make any real difference—"

"But it does annoy you—investigations of your income tax and deporting your men now and then?"

"Well, what of it?"

"Simply this. After some years of effort, I am at last able to say that I control the Government."

"That is the silly brag of a child," sneered the Old Man.

"Not at all," and as he said that, Willowby reached down and picked up a handful of pebbles. "See these stones? In the same way I hold in my hand a majority of the Supreme Court, over two-thirds of the Senators and most of the Representatives. I can swing the votes of enough of the states to pass any kind of legislation I wish. Now here is my proposition. You handle the cities. I will turn over the country to you. Together we will run the nation, and all I want is just one thing—just one little favor from you."

"I bet I can guess what that is," laughed the Old Man.

"No doubt, but let me tell you. I want to be the next President."

"I thought so."

"I think we ought to be to-

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gether on this thing. Perhaps I could be elected without your help, even in spite of your opposition. But if I am, I will, naturally, try to destroy you. We might end up like the Kilkenny cats. But if we are allies, I have eight years of power and you have eight years of liberty in which to plunder the richest nation in the world. How about it?"

The Old Man drew a deep breath.

"Is this on the level?"

"It has to be. I have a reputation, and it is respectable. I am placing myself in your hands. What is there to prevent you from giving the press an interview tomorrow?"

"You would deny it!"

"But no one would listen to me."

"I suppose not. What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to give the order to your leaders. There are a hundred of them, perhaps a few more. No doubt my list is not absolutely accurate. Call them in, from Chicago, St. Louis, New Orleans, Boston and Philadelphia. Have them all in one room. You introduce me. Let me talk to them. I will open the war chest, fifty million to start with, and more to come. You promise them anything you want, and I will make the promise good."

"And you will be there? Right in the room with me?"

"I will be there."

"I won't do it!" growled the Old Man. "I never have and I never will. I don't do things that way. A whisper to one or two, and the business is done, but not a hundred at one time. Some of these boys have never seen me."

"Then you want to turn me down?"

"Not exactly, but I am opposed to that meeting."

"Then we are through talking. I will take you to the five-ten train, or, if you want to, I will have my chauffeur drive you to the city."

"Let's talk it over."

"No."

"How about having six of the Big Boys there?"

"No! All on my list or none."

"Your list?"

"Certainly! I am not sure that it is absolutely correct, but it satisfies me."

"Let me see it."

"No reason why you should not."

The Old Man took the paper that was handed to him. It was no casual glance, he gave the names. At last he handed it back to the little man with the casual comment:

"I suppose that is not all you know about my organization?"

"I suppose not. Why not be sensible about this, Mr. Consuelo? If we fight, we will simply kill each other, but if we become allies who can stop us? But I must be sure of you, and the only way I can be sure is to have you talk to your men, and then let me talk to them. We can have the meeting at night in my offices, you know where, top floor of the

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Empire Trust. No one need be any the wiser. Half an hour, and all the men can go back with the money in their pockets and the orders in their brains."

"O. K. When shall we meet?"

"A month from today at ten P. M."

"Good. I'll give the orders, but I want the money, the fifty million. It is not much, but part of it will help keep the Big Boys in line. Some of them won't like the idea very much."

"A little cash will influence them. Now, how about taking you back to the city?"

Winifred Willowby made preparations for entertaining his one hundred guests. His largest office was transformed into an assembly room. Its inch-thick carpets, overstuffed chairs and mahogany trimmings gave it an air of luxuriant comfort. There were special chairs for the Big Boys and two very special chairs for the Old Man and the Host of the evening. A large picture frame, hanging on one wall, and carefully covered, gave a hint as to part of the evening's ceremony.

The Empire Trust belonged to Willowby. He had built it so that he could have a private office on the top floor, the sixty-third from the ground. The elevator reached this floor, but there were no steps. Many buildings surpassed it in height, but none in the view that it gave of the city. The guests who arrived first commented on the view and expanded their chests when they realized that they carried that city in their vest pockets.

At last every chair was occupied. It was a peculiar gathering. It included judges, politicians, pseudo-business men, several lawyers and even the Mayor of one of the largest cities in the Mississippi Valley. Facing them, sat the Old Man and Willowby.

Of the hundred men in the audience not one was at his ease. Most had come because they were afraid to stay away. Many hoped that they would not be recognized. The majority doubted the wisdom of such a meeting and felt that the Old Man was slipping mentally. It was the first time that many of them had even seen him. He was almost as much of an unknown to them as the little man sitting next to him. A peculiar silence hung over the assembly. More than one man fondled the handle of his automatic. No one seemed to be sure of what was going to happen next. It was a fortunate thing that the meeting was held at night; with the audience composed of such men. A daylight gathering would have been impossible.

The Old Man and Willowby held a short whispered conference, and then the leader of American Racketeers stood up. What had been silence before, now became the hush of death. The Old Man was going to talk, and everyone wanted to hear what he had to say. It did not take him long to start.

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"You Big Boys have been running the cities before," he growled, "but from tonight on we are going to run the country. Congress and the Supreme Court are going to dance to our music and like it. Our new friend here has promised to deliver the goods, and he does not want much in return. I have told him that we will trade, and what I say goes. Now, you boys listen to Willowby, and remember that I am back of him."

Then he sat down. As far as the records are concerned, that was the longest speech the Old Man made in his life. The Boys hardly knew what to do; they felt they should applaud, but not being certain remained quiet. Then Willowby stood up.

"I do not want very much, gentlemen," he remarked. "I only want to be the next President of the United States, and I can be, with your help. Let me show you a picture."

He walked over to the covered picture, pulled a cord and unveiled it and there, life size, were the Old Man and Willowby shaking hands. Anyone could tell who they were and what they were doing. That brought the house down. Everybody felt that it was time for a little noise. Some of them, who knew the Big Boy well enough, went up and congratulated him on the new political alliance. In the confusion, Winifred Willowby slipped out of the room and no one noticed his absence.

But some one did notice the sideboard and started to sample the bottles. Soon everyone was drinking a little. But the Old Man did not drink. He just sat there, moodily chewing his cigar and wondering how much of the fifty million he could keep for his share.

Nobody saw the first rat. It dropped from behind the picture and ran under a chair. The next rat did the same. Perhaps fifty rats were in the room before their presence was noticed. By that time they were coming faster, by the dozen, by the hundred. That was different. One rat in a large room meant nothing. A hundred, five hundred in the same room could mean almost anything.

And now they were literally pouring out from back of the picture. A cursing man pulled it to the floor and there was a large hole in the wall, two feet in diameter, and out of that hole the rats were pouring, big brown, hungry rats, dropping to the floor and starting to hunt for food. The puzzled men jumped up on top the chairs; the rats stood on their hind legs and looked at the large chunks of food with black beady, binoculars. The Old Man just sat there, chewing his cigar and cursing. He knew what it all meant seconds before anyone else.

A number of the most fearful men made a dash for the elevator. They were driven back by a torrent of rats climbing up the elevator shaft. Then *fear came—and panic.* With gun and heel,

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and broken chairs for clubs, they started in to kill rats, and for every one they killed, a hundred fastened to them with chisel teeth. To make it worse, the lights went out, and they were there in the dark, with mutilation as a beginning and death as an ending, and still the rats poured into the room, up the elevator shaft and out of the hole in the wall.

The Old Man walked across the room, kicking the struggling bodies of his followers out of his pathway. Rats ran up his legs and tried to bite his hands, his face; he swept them off him as a tiger would wipe ants off his fur; at last he came to the window. There was the city of New York in front of him, the city of a million twinkling lights, the tomb of a billion dead hopes; the Morgue of a Nation, covered by laughing, painted faces. He raised the sash and sat on the sill.

"Damn Willowby!" he said. "What a fool I was. But I am going to die clean. No rat is going to send me to Hell!"

And then he dropped.

In the room the struggle kept on—for an hour and then two. At last the screaming ceased, and the only sound was the gnawing of the rats, the crunching of their teeth and their satisfied, little squeaks of pleasure.

The next morning Winifred Willowby called on the Chief of the Secret Service of New York. With him were several men from Washington.

"I want to tell you something," he said. "A large group of men borrowed my office to have a meeting last night. They wanted privacy and secrecy and they had heard of my place in the Empire Trust Building. So I loaned them the entire floor for the night. But my janitors tell me that something terrible happened. An army of rats invaded the place, as they have been doing with other places in the city, and literally ate every man there; that is, all except one, a fellow by the name of Consuelo, and he preferred to jump out of a window and die clean on the pavement."

"Consuelo?" asked the Chief. "Not the Old Man? Not *that* Consuelo?"

"I think that is the one. Here is a list of the men who were there. I thought you might like to look it over before you gave it to the papers."

The Chief took the list and read it, puzzled.

"Do you mean these men were there last night?"

"I understand so."

"And now they are dead?"

"I think so. Of course, that is for the coroner to say."

"Do you know who these men were?"

"I suppose they were business associates of Consuelo. At least, that is what he told me."

"They were the hundred biggest gangsters in America. They were the brains of everything

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vicious in American society. There is not a man there whom we have not been after for years, but we just couldn't pin anything on them. Their death in one night gives the decent people in our country a new lease on life. We can go ahead now and get the little fellows. But, tell me, Mr. Willowby, how did it happen?"

"I told you. They had a meeting and the rats came. You know there was a rat racket which no one thoroughly understood. Anyway, the rats came—and killed them. No one can tell exactly what did happen, because everyone who was there was killed. That is all. I am sorry that it happened in my office—but I thought I was doing the man a favor to loan him the place for the meeting."

That night Crawford and Willowby were talking things over. In rushed Rastell and Wilson, brushing the indignant butler aside.

"We have heard a thousand rumors," began Rastell, "and read as many foolish statements in the papers about the rat tragedy, and we just couldn't wait a minute longer. You just have to tell us what happened. We are not going to leave you till you do."

"You tell them, Crawford," whispered Willowby. "Whenever I talk about it, my voice becomes squeaky."

"It happened this way," explained Crawford. "After you started to work, Mr. Willowby decided to go over and study the story of the Piper right in the town of Hamelin. We went there and there was no doubt that the town people really believed that it really happened. They told us all about it, and the more we listened and paid them, the more they told. They gave us the very tune the Piper played to make the rats follow him. It was a simple little thing, and we made some phonograph records of it. It seems that when the rats hear that tune, they want to get as close as they can to the source of the music. Then one old man—he gave us some additional bars which he claimed drove the rats frantic for blood, and we made a record of that also.

"Afterwards we came back to America and went up into Pike County. Not so many rats there but enough to experiment with. We tried the short tune and the long tune and they worked on the American rats just like they did on the Hamelin ones. We put two and two together and decided that the rat racketeers in New York were using this method of attracting rats. Just put a repeating phonograph in a building and start it playing, and then the rats would come and eat everything to pieces. Of course, we did not know the psychology of it, but I suppose it has something to do with the effect of musical vibrations on the rat's nervous system.

"Then Mr. Willowby thought

(*Concluded on page* 106)

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THE JAMESON SATELLITE

By NEIL R. JONES

The mammoths of the ancient world have been wonderfully preserved in the ice of Siberia. The cold, only a few miles out in space, will be far more intense than in the polar regions and its power of preserving the dead body would most probably be correspondingly increased. When the hero-scientist of this story knew he must die, he conceived a brilliant idea for the preservation of his body, the result of which even exceeded his expectations. What, how, and why are cleverly told here.

PROLOGUE

The Rocket Satellite

IN THE depths of space, some twenty thousand miles from the earth, the body of Professor Jameson within its rocket container cruised upon an endless journey, circling the gigantic sphere. The rocket was a satellite of the huge, revolving world around which it held to its orbit. In the year 1958, Professor Jameson had sought for a plan whereby he might preserve his body indefinitely after his death. He had worked long and hard upon the subject.

Since the time of the Pharaohs, the human race had looked for a means by which the dead might be preserved against the ravages of time. Great had been the art of the Egyptians in the embalming of their deceased, a practice which was later lost to humanity of the ensuing mechanical age, never to be rediscovered. But even the embalming of the Egyptians—so Professor Jameson had argued—would be futile in the face of millions of years, the dissolution of the corpses being just as eventual as immediate cremation following death.

The professor had looked for a means by which the body could be preserved perfectly forever.

Amazing Stories, July 1931

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It glowed in a haze of light, the interior clearly revealed.

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But eventually he had come to the conclusion that nothing on earth is unchangeable beyond a certain limit of time. Just as long as he sought an earthly means of preservation, he was doomed to disappointment. All earthly elements are composed of atoms which are forever breaking down and building up, but never destroying themselves. A match may be burned, but the atoms are still unchanged, having resolved themselves into smoke, carbon dioxide, ashes, and certain basic elements. It was clear to the professor that he could never accomplish his purpose if he were to employ one system of atomic structure, such as embalming fluid or other concoction, to preserve another system of atomic structure, such as the human body, when all atomic structure is subject to universal change, no matter how slow.

He had then soliloquized upon the possibility of preserving the human body in its state of death until the end of all earthly time —to that day when the earth would return to the sun from which it had sprung. Quite suddenly one day he had conceived the answer to the puzzling problem which obsessed his mind, leaving him awed with its wild, uncanny potentialities.

He would have his body shot into space enclosed in a rocket to become a satellite of the earth as long as the earth continued to exist. He reasoned logically. Any material substance, whether of organic or inorganic origin, cast into the depths of space would exist indefinitely. He had visualized his dead body enclosed in a rocket flying off into the illimitable maw of space. He would remain in perfect preservation, while on earth millions of generations of mankind would live and die, their bodies to molder into the dust of the forgotten past. He would exist in this unchanged manner until that day when mankind, beneath a cooling sun, should fade out forever in the chill, thin atmosphere of a dying world. And still his body would remain intact and as perfect in its rocket container as on that day of the far-gone past when it had left the earth to be hurled out on its career. What a magnificent idea!

At first he had been assailed with doubts. Suppose his funeral rocket landed upon some other planet or, drawn by the pull of the great sun, were thrown into the flaming folds of the incandescent sphere? Then the rocket might continue on out of the solar system, plunging through the endless seas of space for millions of years, to finally enter the solar system of some far-off star, as meteors often enter ours. Suppose his rocket crashed upon a planet, or the star itself, or became a captive satellite of some celestial body?

It had been at this juncture that the idea of his rocket becoming the satellite of the earth had presented itself, and he had immediately incorporated it into his scheme. The professor had

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figured out the amount of radium necessary to carry the rocket far enough away from the earth so that it would not turn around and crash, and still be not so far away but what the earth's gravitational attraction would keep it from leaving the vicinity of the earth and the solar system. Like the moon, it would forever revolve around the earth.

He had chosen an orbit sixty-five thousand miles from the earth for his rocket to follow. The only fears he had entertained concerned the huge meteors which careened through space at tremendous rates of speed. He had overcome this obstacle, however, and had eliminated the possibilities of a collision with these stellar juggernauts. In the rocket were installed radium repulsion rays which swerved all approaching meteors from the path of the rocket as they entered the vicinity of the space wanderer.

The aged professor had prepared for every contingency, and had set down to rest from his labors, reveling in the stupendous, unparalleled results he would obtain. Never would his body undergo decay; and never would his bones bleach to return to the dust of the earth from which all men originally came and to which they must return. His body would remain millions of years in a perfectly preserved state, untouched by the hoary palm of such time as only geologists and astronomers can conceive.

His efforts would surpass even the wildest dreams of H. Rider Haggard, who depicted the wondrous, embalming practices of the ancient nation of Kor in his immortal novel, "She," wherein Holly, under the escort of the incomparable Ayesha, looked upon the magnificent, lifelike masterpieces of embalming by the long-gone peoples of Kor.

With the able assistance of a nephew, who carried out his instructions and wishes following his death, Professor Jameson was sent upon his pilgrimage into space within the rocket he himself had built. The nephew and heir kept the secret forever locked in his heart.

Generation after generation had passed upon its way. Gradually humanity had come to die out, finally disappearing from the earth altogether. Mankind was later replaced by various other forms of life which dominated the globe for their allotted spaces of time before they too became extinct. The years piled up on one another, running into millions, and still the Jameson Satellite kept its lonely vigil around the earth, gradually closing the distance between satellite and planet, yielding reluctantly to the latter's powerful attraction.

Forty million years later, its orbit ranged some twenty thousand miles from the earth while the dead world edged ever nearer the cooling sun whose dull, red ball covered a large expanse of

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the sky. Surrounding the flaming sphere, many of the stars could be perceived through the earth's thin, rarefied atmosphere. As the earth cut in slowly and gradually toward the solar luminary, so was the moon revolving ever nearer the earth, appearing like a great gem glowing in the twilight sky.

The rocket containing the remains of Professor Jameson continued its endless travel around the great ball of the earth whose rotation had now ceased entirely —one side forever facing the dying sun. There it pursued its lonely way, a cosmic coffin, accompanied by its funeral cortege of scintillating stars amid the deep silence of the eternal space which enshrouded it. Solitary it remained, except for the occasional passing of a meteor flitting by at a remarkable speed on its aimless journey through the vacuum between the far-flung worlds.

Would the satellite follow its orbit to the world's end, or would its supply of radium soon exhaust itself after so many eons of time, converting the rocket into the prey of the first large meteor which chanced that way? Would it some day return to the earth as its nearer approach portended, and increase its acceleration in a long arc to crash upon the surface of the dead planet? And when the rocket terminated its career, would the body of Professor Jameson be found perfectly preserved or merely a crumbled mound of dust?

CHAPTER I

40,000,000 Years After

ENTERING within the boundaries of the solar system, a long, dark, pointed craft sped across the realms of space towards the tiny point of light which marked the dull red ball of the dying sun which would some day lie cold and dark forever. Like a huge meteor it flashed into the solar system from another chain of planets far out in the illimitable Universe of stars and worlds, heading towards the great red sun at an inconceivable speed.

Within the interior of the space traveler, queer creatures of metal labored at the controls of the space flyer which juggernauted on its way towards the far-off solar luminary. Rapidly it crossed the orbits of Neptune and Uranus and headed sunward. The bodies of these queer creatures were square blocks of a metal closely resembling steel, while for appendages, the metal cube was upheld by four jointed legs capable of movement. A set of six tentacles, all metal, like the rest of the body, curved outward from the upper half of the cubic body. Surmounting it was a queer-shaped head rising to a peak in the center and equipped with a circle of eyes all the way around the head. The creatures, with their mechanical eyes equipped with metal shutters, could see in all directions. A single eye pointed directly up-

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ward, being situated in the space of the peaked head, resting in a slight depression of the cranium.

These were the Zoromes of the planet Zor which rotated on its way around a star millions of light years distant from our solar system. The Zoromes, several hundred thousand years before, had reached a stage in science, where they searched for immortality and eternal relief from bodily ills and various deficiencies of flesh and blood anatomy. They had sought freedom from death, and had found it, but at the same time they had destroyed the propensities for birth. And for several hundred thousand years there had been no births and few deaths in the history of the Zoromes.

This strange race of people had built their own mechanical bodies, and by operation upon one another had removed their brains to the metal heads from which they directed the functions and movements of their inorganic anatomies. There had been no deaths due to worn-out bodies. When one part of the mechanical men wore out, it was replaced by a new part, and so the Zoromes continued living their immortal lives which saw few casualties. It was true that, since the innovation of the machines, there had been a few accidents which had seen the destruction of the metal heads with their brains. These were irreparable. Such cases had been few, however, and the population of Zor had decreased but little. The machine men of Zor had no use for atmosphere, and had it not been for the terrible coldness of space, could have just as well existed in the ether void as upon some planet. Their metal bodies, especially their metal-encased brains, did require a certain amount of heat even though they were able to exist comfortably in temperatures which would instantly have frozen to death a flesh-and-blood creature.

The most popular pastime among the machine men of Zor was the exploration of the Universe. This offorded them a never ending source of interest in the discovery of the variegated inhabitants and conditions of the various planets on which they came to rest. Hundreds of space ships were sent out in all directions, many of them being upon their expeditions for hundreds of years before they returned once more to the home planet of far-off Zor.

This particular space craft of the Zoromes had entered the solar system whose planets were gradually circling in closer to the dull red ball of the declining sun. Several of the machine men of the space craft's crew, which numbered some fifty individuals, were examining the various planets of this particular planetary system carefully through telescopes possessing immense power.

These machine men had no names and were indexed according to letters and numbers. They conversed by means of thought

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impulses, and were neither capable of making a sound vocally nor of hearing one uttered.

"Where shall we go?" queried one of the men at the controls questioning another who stood by his side examining a chart on the wall.

"They all appear to be dead worlds, 4R-3579," replied the one addressed, "but the second planet from the sun appears to have an atmosphere which might sustain a few living creatures, and the third planet may also prove interesting for it has a satellite. We shall examine the inner planets first of all, and explore the outer ones later if we decide it is worth the time."

"Too much trouble for nothing," ventured 9G-721. "This system of planets offers us little but what we have seen many times before in our travels. The sun is so cooled that it cannot sustain the more common life on its planets, the type of life forms we usually find in our travels. We should have visited a planetary system with a brighter sun."

"You speak of common life," remarked 25X-987. "What of the uncommon life? Have we not found life existent on cold, dead planets with no sunlight and atmosphere at all?"

"Yes, we have," admitted 9G-721, "but such occasions are exceedingly rare."

"The possibility exists, however, even in this case," reminded 4R-3579, "and what if we do spend a bit of unprofitable time in this one planetary system—haven't we all an endless lifetime before us? Eternity is ours."

"We shall visit the second planet first of all," directed 25X-987, who was in charge of this particular expedition of the Zoromes, "and on the way there we shall cruise along near the third planet to see what we can of the surface. We may be able to tell whether or not it holds anything of interest to us. If it does, after visiting the second planet, we shall then return to the third. The first world is not worth bothering with."

The space ship from Zor raced on in a direction which would take it several thousand miles above the earth and then on to the planet which we know as Venus. As the space ship rapidly neared the earth, it slackened its speed, so that the Zoromes might examine it closely with their glasses as the ship passed the third planet.

Suddenly, one of the machine men ran excitedly into the room where 25X-987 stood watching the topography of the world beneath him.

"We have found something!" he exclaimed.

"What?"

"Another space ship!"

"Where?"

"But a short distance ahead of us on our course. Come into the foreport of the ship and you can pick it up with the glass."

"Which is the way it's going?" asked 25X-987.

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"It is behaving queerly," replied the machine man of Zor. "It appears to be in the act of circling the planet."

"Do you suppose that there really is life on that dead world—intelligent beings like ourselves, and that this is one of their space craft?"

"Perhaps it is another exploration craft like our own from some other world," was the suggestion.

"But not of ours," said 25X-987.

Together, the two Zoromes now hastened into the observation room of the space ship where more of the machine men were excitedly examining the mysterious space craft, their thought impulses flying thick and fast like bodiless bullets.

"It is very small!"

"Its speed is slow!"

"The craft can hold but few men," observed one.

"We do not yet know of what size the creatures are," reminded another. "Perhaps there are thousands of them in that space craft out there. They may be of such a small size that it will be necessary to look twice before finding one of them. Such beings are not unknown."

"We shall soon overtake it and see."

"I wonder if they have seen us?"

"Where do you suppose it came from?"

"From the world beneath us," was the suggestion.

"Perhaps."

CHAPTER II

The Mysterious Space Craft

THE machine men made way for their leader, 25X-987, who regarded the space craft ahead of them critically.

"Have you tried communicating with it yet?" he asked.

"There is no reply to any of our signals," came the answer.

"Come alongside of it then," ordered their commander. "It is small enough to be brought inside our carrying compartment, and we can see with our penetration rays just what manner of creatures it holds. They are intelligent, that is certain, for their space ship does imply as much."

The space flyer of the Zoromes slowed up as it approached the mysterious wanderer of the cosmic void which hovered in the vicinity of the dying world.

"What a queer shape it has," remarked 25X-987. "It is even smaller than I had previously calculated."

A rare occurrence had taken place among the machine men of Zor. They were overcome by a great curiosity which they could not allow to remain unsatiated. Accustomed as they were to witnessing strange sights and still stranger creatures, meeting up with weird adventures in various corners of the Universe, they had now become hardened to the usual run of experiences which they were in the habit of encountering. It took a great deal

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to arouse their unperturbed attitudes. Something new, however, about this queer space craft had gripped their imaginations, and perhaps a subconscious influence asserted to their minds that here they have come across an adventure radically unusual.

"Come alongside it," repeated 25X-987 to the operator as he returned to the control room and gazed through the side of the space ship in the direction of the smaller cosmic wanderer.

"I'm trying to," replied the machine man, "but it seems to jump away a bit every time I get within a certain distance of it. Our ship seems to jump backward a bit too."

"Are they trying to elude us?"

"I don't know. They should pick up more speed if that is their object."

"Perhaps they are now progressing at their maximum speed and cannot increase their acceleration any more."

"Look!" exclaimed the operator. "Did you just see that? The thing has jumped away from us again!"

"Our ship moved also," said 25X-987. "I saw a flash of light shoot from the side of the other craft as it jumped."

Another machine man now entered and spoke to the commander of the Zorome expedition.

"They are using radium repellent rays to keep us from approaching," he informed.

"Counteract it," instructed 25X-987.

The man left. and now the machine man at the controls of the craft tried again to close with the mysterious wanderer of the space between planets. The effort was successful, and this time there was no glow of repulsion rays from the side of the long metal cylinder.

They now entered the compartment where various objects were transferred from out the depths of space to the interplanetary craft. Then patiently they waited for the rest of the machine men to open the side of their space ship and bring in the queer, elongated cylinder.

"Put it under the penetration ray!" ordered 25X-987. "Then we shall see what it contains!"

The entire group of Zoromes were assembled about the long cylinder, whose low nickel-plated sides shone brilliantly. With interest they regarded the fifteen-foot object which tapered a bit towards its base. The nose was pointed like a bullet. Eight cylindrical protuberances were affixed to the base while the four sides were equipped with fins such as are seen on aerial bombs to guide them in a direct, unswerving line through the atmosphere. At the base of the strange craft there projected a lever, while in one side was a door which, apparently opened outward. One of the machine men reached forward to open it but was halted by the admonition of the commander.

"Do not open it up yet!" he warned. "We are not aware of what it contains!"

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Guided by the hand of one of the machine men, a series of lights shone down upon the cylinder. It became enveloped in a haze of light which rendered the metal sides of the mysterious space craft dim and indistinct while the interior of the cylinder was as clearly revealed as if there had been no covering. The machine men, expecting to see at least several, perhaps many, strange creatures moving about within the metal cylinder, stared aghast at the sight they beheld. There was but one creature, and he was lying perfectly still, either in a state of suspended animation or else of death. He was about twice the height of the mechanical men of Zor. For a long time they gazed at him in a silence of thought, and then their leader instructed them.

"Take him out of the container."

The penetration rays were turned off, and two of the machine men stepped eagerly forward and opened the door. One of them peered within at the recumbent body of the weird-looking individual with the four appendages. The creature lay up against a luxuriously upholstered interior, a strap affixed to his chin while four more straps held both the upper and lower appendages securely to the insides of the cylinder. The machine man released these, and with the help of his comrade removed the body of the creature from the cosmic coffin in which they had found it.

"He is dead!" pronounced one of the machine men ofter a long and careful examination of the corpse. "He has been like this for a long time."

"There are strange thought impressions left upon his mind," remarked another.

One of the machine men, whose metal body was of a different shade than that of his companions, stepped forward, his cubic body bent over that of the strange, cold creature who was garbed in fantastic accoutrements. He examined the dead organism a moment, and then he turned to his companions.

"Would you like to hear his story?" he asked.

"Yes!" came the concerted reply.

"You shall, then," was the ultimatum. "Bring him into my laboratory. I shall remove his brain and stimulate the cells into activity once more. We shall give him life again, transplanting his brain into the head of one of our machines."

With these words he directed two of the Zoromes to carry the corpse into the laboratory.

As the space ship cruised about in the vicinity of this third planet which 25X-987 had decided to visit on finding the metal cylinder with its queer inhabitant, 8B-52, the experimenter, worked unceasingly in his laboratory to revive the long-dead brain cells to action once more. Finally, after consummating his desires and having his efforts crowned with success, he

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placed the brain within the head of a machine. The brain was brought to consciousness. The creature's body was discarded after the all-important brain had been removed.

CHAPTER III

Recalled to Life

AS PROFESSOR Jameson came to, he became aware of a strange feeling. He was sick. The doctors had not expected him to live; they had frankly told him so—but he had cared little in view of the long, happy years stretched out behind him. Perhaps he was not to die yet. He wondered how long he had slept. How strange he felt—as if he had no body. Why couldn't he open his eyes? He tried very hard. A mist swam before him. His eyes had been open all the time but he had not seen before. That was queer, he ruminated. All was silent about his bedside. Had all the doctors and nurses left him to sleep—or to die?

Devil take that mist which now swam before him, obscuring everything in line of vision. He would call his nephew. Vainly he attempted to shout the word "Douglas," but to no avail. Where was his mouth? It seemed as if he had none. Was it all delirium? The strange silence—perhaps he had lost his sense of hearing along with his ability to speak—and he could see nothing distinctly. The mist had transferred itself into a confused jumble of indistinct objects, some of which moved about before him.

He was now conscious of some impulse in his mind which kept questioning him as to how he felt. He was conscious of other strange ideas which seemed to be impressed upon his brain, but this one thought concerning his indisposition clamored insistently over the lesser ideas. It even seemed just as if someone was addressing him, and impulsively he attempted to utter a sound and tell them how queer he felt. It seemed as if speech had been taken from him. He could not talk, no matter how hard he tried. It was no use. Strange to say, however, the impulse within his mind appeared to be satisfied with the effort, and it now put another question to him. Where was he from? What a strange question—when he was at home. He told them as much. Had he always lived there? Why, yes, of course.

The aged professor was now becoming more astute as to his condition. At first it was only a mild, passive wonderment at his helplessness and the strange thoughts which raced through his mind. Now he attempted to arouse himself from the lethargy.

Quite suddenly his sight cleared, and what a surprise! He could see all the way around him without moving his head! And he could look at the ceiling of his room! His room? Was it his

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room! No— It just couldn't be. Where was he? What were those queer machines before him? They moved on four legs. Six tentacles curled outward from their cubical bodies. One of the machines stood close before him. A tentacle shot out from the object and rubbed his head. How strange it felt upon his brow. Instinctively he obeyed the impulse to shove the contraption of metal from him with his hands.

His arms did not rise, instead six tentacles projected upward to force back the machine. Professor Jameson gasped mentally in surprise as he gazed at the result of his urge to push the strange, unearthly looking machine-caricature from him. With trepidation he looked down at his own body to see where the tentacles had come from, and his surprise turned to sheer fright and amazement. His body was like the moving machine which stood before him! Where was he? What ever had happened to him so suddenly? Only a few moments ago he had been in his bed, with the doctors and his nephew bending over him, expecting him to die. The last words he had remembered hearing was the cryptic announcement of one of the doctors.

"He is going now."

But he hadn't died after all, apparently. A horrible thought struck him! Was this the life after death? Or was it an illusion of the mind? He became aware that the machine in front of him was attempting to communicate something to him. How could it, thought the professor, when he had no mouth. The desire to communicate an idea to him became more insistent. The suggestion of the machine man's question was in his mind. Telepathy, thought he.

The creature was asking about the place whence he had come. He didn't know; his mind was in such a turmoil of thoughts and conflicting ideas. He allowed himself to be led to a window where the machine with waving tentacle pointed towards an object outside. It was a queer sensation to be walking on the four metal legs. He looked from the window and he saw that which caused him to nearly drop over, so astounded was he.

The professor found himself gazing out from the boundless depths of space across the cosmic void to where a huge planet lay quiet. Now he was sure it was an illusion which made his mind and sight behave so queerly. He was troubled by a very strange dream. Carefully he examined the topography of the gigantic globe which rested off in the distance. At the same time he could see back of him the concourse of mechanical creatures crowding up behind him, and he was aware of a telepathic conversation which was being carried on behind him—or just before him. Which was it now? Eyes extended all the way around his head, while there existed no difference on any of the four sides of his

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cubed body. His mechanical legs were capable of moving in any of four given directions with perfect ease, he discovered.

The planet was not the earth—of that he was sure. None of the familiar continents lay before his eyes. And then he saw the great dull red ball of the dying sun. That was not the sun of his earth. It had been a great deal more brilliant.

"Did you come from that planet?" came the thought impulse from the mechanism by his side.

"No," he returned.

He then allowed the machine men—for he assumed that they were machine men, and he reasoned that, somehow or other they had by some marvelous transformation made him over just as they were—to lead him through the craft of which he now took notice for the first time. It was an interplanetary flyer, or space ship, he firmly believed.

25X-987 now took him to the compartment which they had removed him to from the strange container they had found wandering in the vicinity of the nearby world. There they showed him the long cylinder.

"It's my rocket satellite!" exclaimed Professor Jameson to himself, though in reality every one of the machine men received his thoughts plainly. "What is it doing here?"

"We found your dead body within it," answered 25X-987. "Your brain was removed to the machine after having been stimulated into activity once more. Your carcass was thrown away."

Professor Jameson just stood dumfounded by the words of the machine man.

"So I did die!" exclaimed the professor. "And my body was placed within the rocket to remain in everlasting preservation until the end of all earthly time! Success! I have now attained unrivaled success!"

He then turned to the machine man.

"How long have I been that way?" he asked excitedly.

"How should we know?" replied the Zorome. "We picked up your rocket only a short time ago, which, according to your computation, would be less than a day. This is our first visit to your planetary system and we chanced upon your rocket. So it is a satellite? We didn't watch it long enough to discover whether or not it was a satellite. At first we thought it to be another traveling space craft, but when it refused to answer our signals we investigated."

"And so that was the earth at which I looked," mused the professor. "No wonder I didn't recognize it. The topography has changed so much. How different the sun appears—it must have been over a million years ago when I died!"

"Many millions," corrected 25X-987. "Suns of such size as this one do not cool in so short a time as you suggest."

Professor Jameson, in spite of all his amazing computations be-

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fore his death, was staggered by the reality.

"Who are you?" he suddenly asked.

"We are the Zoromes from Zor, a planet of a sun far across the Universe."

25X-987 then went on to tell Professor Jameson something about how the Zoromes had attained their high stage of development and had instantly put a stop to all birth, evolution and death of their people, by becoming machine men.

CHAPTER IV

The Dying World

"AND now tell us of yourself," said 25X-987, "and about your world."

Professor Jameson, noted in college as a lecturer of no mean ability and perfectly capable of relating intelligently to them the story of the earth's history, evolution and march of events following the birth of civilization up until the time when he died, began his story. The mental speech hampered him for a time, but he soon became accustomed to it so as to use it easily, and he found it preferable to vocal speech after a while. The Zoromes listened interestedly to the long account until Professor Jameson had finished.

"My nephew," concluded the professor, "evidently obeyed my instructions and placed my body in the rocket I had built, shooting it out into space where I became the satellite of the earth for these many millions of years."

"Do you really want to know how long you were dead before we found you?" asked 25X-987. "It would be interesting to find out."

"Yes, I should like very much to know," replied the professor.

"Our greatest mathematician, 459C-79, will tell it to you." The mathematician stepped forward. Upon one side of his cube were many buttons arranged in long columns and squares.

"What is your unit of measuring?" he asked.

"A mile."

"How many times more is a mile than is the length of your rocket satellite?"

"My rocket is fifteen feet long. A mile is five thousand two hundred and eighty feet."

The mathematician depressed a few buttons.

"How far, or how many miles from the sun was your planet at that time?"

"Ninety-three million miles," was the reply.

"And your world's satellite—which you call moon from your planet—earth?"

"Two hundred and forty thousand miles."

"And your rocket?"

"I figured it to go about sixty-five thousand miles from the earth."

"It was only twenty thousand miles from the earth when we picked it up," said the mathematician, depressing a few more

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buttons. "The moon and sun are also much nearer your planet now."

Professor Jameson gave way to a mental ejaculation of amazement.

"Do you know how long you have cruised around the planet in your own satellite?" said the mathematician. "Since you began that journey, the planet which you call the earth has revolved around the sun over forty million times."

"Forty—million—years!" exclaimed Professor Jameson haltingly. "Humanity must then have all perished from the earth long ago! I'm the last man on earth!"

"It is a dead world now," interjected 25X-987.

"Of course," elucidated the mathematician, "those last few million years are much shorter than the ones in which you lived. The earth's orbit is of less diameter and its speed of revolution is greatly increased, due to its proximity to the cooling sun. I should say that your year was some four times as long as the time in which it now takes your old planet to circumnavigate the sun.

"How many days were there in your year?"

"Three hundred and sixty-five."

"The planet has now ceased rotating entirely."

"Seems queer that your rocket satellite should avoid the meteors so long," observed 459C-79, the mathematician.

"Automatic radium repulsion rays," explained the professor.

"The very rays which kept us from approaching your rocket," stated 25X-987, "until we neutralized them."

"You died and were shot out into space long before any life occurred on Zor," soliloquized one of the machine men. "Our people had not yet even been born when yours had probably disappeared entirely from the face of the earth."

"Hearken to 72N-4783," said 25X-987, "he is our philosopher, and he just loves to dwell on the past life of Zor when we were flesh and blood creatures with the threat of death hanging always over our heads. At that time, like the life you knew, we were born, we lived and died, all within a very short time, comparatively."

"Of course, time has come to mean nothing to us, especially when we are out in space," observed 72N-4783. "We never keep track of it on our expeditions, though back in Zor such accounts are accurately kept. By the way, do you know how long we stood here while you recounted to us the history of your plannet? Our machine bodies never get tired, you know."

"Well," ruminated Professor Jameson, giving a generous allowance of time. "I should say about a half a day, although it seemed scarcely as long as that."

"We listened to you for four days," replied 72N-4783.

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Professor Jameson was really aghast.

"Really, I hadn't meant to be such a bore," he apologized.

"That is nothing," replied the other. "Your story was interesting, and if it had been twice as long, it would not have mattered, nor would it have seemed any longer. Time is merely relative, and in space actual time does not exist at all, any more than your forty million years' cessation of life seemed more than a few moments to you. We saw that it was so when your first thought impressions reached us following your revival."

"Let us continue on to your planet earth," then said 25X-987. "Perhaps we shall find more startling disclosures there."

As the space ship of the Zoromes approached the sphere from which Professor Jameson had been hurled in his rocket forty million years before, the professor was wondering how the earth would appear, and what radical changes he would find. Already he knew that the geographical conditions of the various continents were changed. He had seen as much from the space ship.

A short time later the earth was reached. The space travelers from Zor, as well as Professor Jameson, emerged from the cosmic flyer to walk upon the surface of the planet. The earth had ceased rotating, leaving one-half its surface always toward the sun. This side of the earth was heated to a considerable degree, while its antipodes, turned always away from the solar luminary, was a cold, frigid, desolate waste. The space travelers from Zor did not dare to advance very far into either hemisphere, but landed on the narrow, thousand-mile strip of territory separating the earth's frozen half from its sun-baked antipodes.

As Professor Jameson emerged from the space ship with 25X-987, he stared in awe at the great transformation four hundred thousand centuries had wrought. The earth's surface, its sky and the sun were all so changed and unearthly appearing. Off to the east the blood red ball of the slowly cooling sun rested upon the horizon, lighting up the eternal day. The earth's rotation had ceased entirely, and it hung motionless in the sky as it revolved around its solar parent, its orbit slowly but surely cutting in toward the great body of the sun. The two inner planets, Mercury and Venus, were now very close to the blood red orb whose scintillating, dazzling brilliance had been lost in its cooling process. Soon, the two nearer planets would succumb to the great pull of the solar luminary and return to the flaming folds, from which they had been hurled out as gaseous bodies in the dim, age-old past, when their careers had just begun.

The atmosphere was nearly gone, so rarefied had it become, and through it Professor Jameson could view with amazing clarity without discomfort to his

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eyes the bloated body of the dying sun. It appeared many times the size he had seen it at the time of his death, on account of its relative nearness. The earth had advanced a great deal closer to the great star around which it swung.

The sky towards the west was pitch black except for the iridescent twinkle of the fiery stars which studded that section of the heavens. As he watched, a faint glow suffused the western sky, gradually growing brighter, the full moon majestically lifted itself above the horizon, casting its pale, ethereal radiance upon the dying world beneath. It was increased to many times the size Professor Jameson had ever seen it during his natural lifetime. The earth's greater attraction was drawing upon the moon just as the sun was pulling the earth ever nearer itself.

This cheerless landscape confronting the professor represented the state of existence to which the earth had come. It was a magnificent spread of loneliness which bore no witness to the fact that it had seen the teeming of life in better ages long ago. The weird, yet beautiful scene, spread in a melancholy panorama before his eyes, drove his thoughts into gloomy abstraction with its dismal, depressing influence. Its funereal, oppressive aspect smote him suddenly with the chill of a terrible loneliness.

25X-987 aroused Professor Jameson from his lethargic reverie. "Let us walk around and see what we can find. I can understand how you feel in regard to the past. It is quite a shock—but it must happen to all worlds sooner or later—even to Zor. When that time comes, the Zoromes will find a new planet on which to live. If you travel with us, you will become accustomed to the sight of seeing dead, lifeless worlds as well as new and beautiful ones pulsating with life and energy. Of course, this world being your own, holds a peculiar sentimental value to you, but it is really one planet among billions."

Professor Jameson was silent.

"I wonder whether or not there are any ruins here to be found?" queried 25X-987.

"I don't believe so," replied the professor. "I remember hearing an eminent scientist of my day state that, given fifty thousand years, every structure and other creation of man would be obliterated entirely from off the earth's surface."

"And he was right." endorsed the machine man of Zor. "Time is a great effacer."

For a long time the machine men wandered over the dreary surface of the earth, and then 25X-987 suggested a change of territory to explore. In the space ship, they moved around the earth to the other side, still keeping to the belt of shadowland which completely encircled the globe like some gigantic ring. Where they now landed arose a series of cones with hollow peaks.

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"Volcanoes!" exclaimed the professor.

"Extinct ones," added the machine man.

Leaving the space ship, the fifty or more machine men, including also Professor Jameson, were soon exploring the curiously shaped peaks. The professor, in his wanderings had strayed away from the rest, and now advanced into one of the cup-like depressions of the peak, out of sight of his companions, the Zoromes.

CHAPTER V

Eternity or Death

HE was well in the center of the cavity when the soft ground beneath him gave way suddenly and he catapulted below into the darkness. Through the Stygian gloom he fell in what seemed to be an endless drop. He finally crashed upon something hard. The thin crust of the volcano's mouth had broken through, precipitating him into the deep, hollow interior.

It must have been a long ways to fall—or so it had seemed. Why was he not knocked senseless or killed? Then he felt himself over with three tentacles. His metal legs were four broken, twisted masses of metal, while the lower half of his cubic body was jammed out of shape and split. He could not move, and half of his six tentacles were paralyzed.

How would he ever get out of there? he wondered. The machine men of Zor might never find him. What would happen to him, then? He would remain in this deathless, monotonous state forever in the black hole of the volcano's interior unable to move. What a horrible thought! He could not starve to death; eating was unknown among the Zoromes, the machines requiring no food. He could not even commit suicide. The only way for him to die would be to smash the strong metal head, and in his present immovable condition, this was impossible.

It suddenly occurred to him to radiate thoughts for help. Would the Zoromes receive his messages? He wondered how far the telepathic messages would carry. He concentrated the powers of his mind upon the call for help, and repeatedly stated his position and plight. He then left his mind clear to receive the thought answers of the Zoromes. He received none. Again he tried. Still he received no welcoming answer. Professor Jameson became dejected.

It was hopeless. The telepathic messages had not reached the machine men of Zor. They were too far away, just as one person may be out of earshot of another's voice. He was doomed to a terrible fate of existence! It were better that his rocket had never been found. He wished that the Zoromes had destroyed him instead of bringing him back to life—back to this!

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His thoughts were suddenly broken in upon.

"We're coming!"

"Don't give up hope!"

If the professor's machine body had been equipped with a heart, it would have sung for joy at these welcome thought impressions. A short time later there appeared in the ragged break of the volcano's mouth, where he had fallen through, the metal head of one of the machine men.

"We shall have you out of there soon," he said.

The professor never knew how they managed it for he lost consciousness under some strange ray of light they projected down upon him in his prison. When he came to consciousness once more, it was to find himself inside the space ship.

"If you had fallen and had smashed your head, it would have been all over with you," were the first thought impulses which greeted him. "As it is, however, we can fix you up first rate."

"Why didn't you answer the first time I called to you?" asked the professor. "Didn't you hear me?"

"We heard you, and we answered, but you didn't hear us. You see, your brain is different than ours, and though you can send thought waves as far as we can you cannot receive them from such a great distance."

"I'm wrecked," said the professor, gazing at his twisted limbs, paralyzed tentacles and jammed body.

"We shall repair you," came the reply. "It is your good fortune that your head was not crushed."

"What are you going to do with me?" queried the professor. "Will you remove my brains to another machine?"

"No, it isn't necessary. We shall merely remove your head and place it upon another machine body."

The Zoromes immediately set to work upon the task, and soon had Professor Jameson's metal head removed from the machine which he had wrecked in his fall down the crater. All during the painless operation, the professor kept up a series of thought exchanges in conversation with the Zoromes, and it seemed but a short time before his head surmounted a new machine and he was ready for further exploration. In the course of his operation, the space ship had moved to a new position, and now as they emerged 25X-987 kept company with Professor Jameson.

"I must keep an eye on you," he said. "You will be getting into more trouble before you get accustomed to the metal bodies."

But Professor Jameson was doing a great deal of thinking. Doubtlessly, these strange machine men who had picked up his rocket in the depths of space and had brought him back to life, were expecting him to travel with them and become adopted

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into the ranks of the Zoromes. Did he want to go with them? He couldn't decide. He had forgotten that the machine men could read his innermost thoughts.

"You wish to remain here alone upon the earth?" asked 25X-987. "It is your privilege if you really want it so."

"I don't know," replied Professor Jameson truthfully.

He gazed at the dust around his feet. It had probably been the composition of men, and had changed from time to time into various other atomic structures —of other queer forms of life which had succeeded mankind. It was the law of the atom which never died. And now he had within his power perpetual existence. He could be immortal if he wished! It would be an immortality of never-ending adventures in the vast, endless Universe among the galaxy of stars and planets.

A great loneliness seized him. Would he be happy among these machine men of another far-off world—among these Zoromes? They were kindly and solicitous of his welfare. What better fate could he expect? Still, a longing for his own kind arose in him—the call of humanity. It was irresistible. What could he do? Was it not in vain? Humanity had long since disappeared from the earth—millions of years ago. He wondered what lay beyond the pales of death—the real death, where the body decomposed and wasted away to return to the dust of the earth and assume new atomic structures.

He had begun to wonder whether or not he had been dead all these forty millions of years —suppose he had been merely in a state of suspended animation. He had remembered a scientist of his day, who had claimed that the body does not die at the point of official death. According to the claims of this man, the cells of the body did not die at the moment at which respiration, heart beats and the blood circulation ceased, but it existed in the semblance of life for several days afterward, especially in the cells of the bones, which died last of all.

Perhaps when he had been sent out into space in his rocket right after his death, the action of the cosmic void was to halt his slow death of the cells in his body, and hold him in suspended animation during the ensuing millions of years. Suppose he should really die—destroying his own brain? What lay beyond real death? Would it be a better plane of existence than the Zoromes could offer him? Would he rediscover humanity, or had they long since arisen to higher planes of existence or reincarnation? Did time exist beyond the mysterious portals of death? If not, then it was possible for him to join the souls of the human race. Had he really been dead all this time? If so, he knew what to expect in case he really destroyed his own brain. Oblivion!

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Again the intense feeling of loneliness surged over him and held him within its melancholy grasp. Desperately, he decided to find the nearest cliff and jump from it—head-first! Humanity called; no man lived to companion him. His four metal limbs carried him swiftly to the summit of a nearby precipice. Why not gamble on the hereafter? 25X-987, understanding his trend of thought, did not attempt to restrain him. Instead, the machine man of Zor waited patiently.

As Professor Jameson stood there meditating upon the jump which would hurl him now into a new plane of existence— or into oblivion, the thought transference of 25X-987 reached him. It was laden with the wisdom born of many planets and thousands of centuries' experience.

"Why jump?" asked the machine man. "The dying world holds your imagination within a morbid clutch. It is all a matter of mental condition. Free your mind of this fascinating influence and come with us to visit other worlds, many of them are both beautiful and new. You will then feel a great difference.

"Will you come?"

The professor considered for a moment as he resisted the impulse to dive off the declivity to the enticing rocks far below. An inspiration seized him. Backing away from the edge of the cliff, he joined 25X-987 once more.

"I shall come," he stated.

He would become an immortal after all and join the Zoromes in their never-ending adventures from world to world. They hastened to the space ship to escape the depressing, dreary influence of the dying world, which had nearly driven Professor Jameson to take the fatal leap to oblivion.

THE END

THE RAT RACKET

(*Concluded from page* 85)

that it would be a good idea to make a great rat trap and attract all the rats in the city to it. He had a good deal of work done in the Empire Trust, and rigged up a phonograph with a lot of loud speakers in different parts of the basement. He ran a lot of ropes down a ventilating shaft for the rats to climb on. I think it was his original idea to have them come up to his office by the millions and then use some kind of gas on them. At least, he wanted to get rid of the rats. Someone must have turned on the phonograph with the entire record. Mr. Willowby left the room, went down the elevator and being somewhat absent-minded, told the elevator boy that he could go for the night. Of course, he was surprised to hear all about it the next morning. All he wanted to do was to get rid of the rats."

"Exactly!" purred Mr. Winifred Willowby.

And he lit another cigarette.

THE END

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The Strange Flight of Richard Clayton

By ROBERT BLOCH

A lifetime in a single, tiny cell. Terrible indeed was the prospect to a living, breathing, thinking individual. A no more monotonous, terrifying prison could possibly be conceived. With no pardon in the offing; no release to be waiting as a reward. But regardless, the breathtaking achievement would be its own reward and well worth the price.

Amazing Stories, March 1939.

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RICHARD CLAYTON braced himself so that he stood like a diver waiting to plunge from a high board into the blue. In truth he was a diver. A silver space-ship was his board, and he meant to plunge not down, but up into the blue sky. Nor was it a matter of twenty or thirty feet he meant to go—instead, he was plunging millions of miles.

With a deep breath, the pudgy, moon-faced scientist raised his hands to the cold steel lever, closed his eyes, and jerked. The switch moved downward.

For a moment nothing happened.

Then a sudden jerk threw Clayton to the floor. The *Future* was moving!

The pinions of a bird beating as it soars into the sky—the wings of a moth thrumming in flight—the quivering behind leaping muscles; of these things the shock was made.

The space-ship *Future* vibrated madly. It rocked from side to side, and a humming shook the steel walls. Richard Clayton lay dazed as a high-pitched droning arose within the vessel. He rose to his feet, rubbing a bruised forehead, and lurched to his tiny bunk. The ship was moving, yet the terrible vibration did not abate. He glanced at the controls and then swore softly.

"Good God! The panel is shattered!"

It was true. The instrument board had been broken by the shock. The cracked glass had fallen to the floor, and the dials swung aimlessly on the bare face of the panel.

Clayton sat there in despair. This was a major tragedy. His thoughts flashed back thirty years to the time when he, a boy of ten, had been inspired by Lindbergh's flight. He recalled his studies; how he had utilized the money of his millionaire father to perfect a flying machine which would cross Space itself.

For years Richard Clayton had worked and dreamed and planned. He studied the Russians and their rockets, organized the Clayton Foundation and hired mechanics, mathematicians, astronomers, engineers to labor with him.

Then there had been the discovery of atomic propulsion, and the building of the *Future*. The *Future* was a shell of steel and duraluminum, windowless and insulated by a guarded process. In the tiny cabin were oxygen tanks, stores of food tablets, energizing chemicals, air-conditioning arrangements — and space for a man to walk six paces.

It was a small steel cell; but in it Richard Clayton meant to realize his ambitions. Aided in his soaring by rockets to get him past the gravitational pull of Earth, then flying by means of the atomic-discharge propulsion, Clayton meant to reach Mars and return.

It would take ten years to reach Mars; ten years to return,

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for the grounding of the vessel would set off additional rocket-discharges. A thousand miles an hour—not an imaginative "speed of light" journey, but a slow, grim voyage, scientifically accurate. The panels were set, and Clayton had no need to guide his vessel. It was automatic.

"But now what?" Clayton said, staring at the shattered glass. He had lost touch with the outer world. He would be unable to read his progress on the board, unable to judge time and distance and direction. He would sit here for ten, twenty years—all alone in a tiny cabin. There had been no room for books or paper or games to amuse him. He was a prisoner in the black void of Space.

The earth had already faded far below him; soon it would be a ball of burning green fire smaller than the ball of red fire ahead—the fire of Mars.

Crowds had swarmed the field to watch him take off; his assistant Jerry Chase had controlled them. Clayton pictured them watching his shining steel cylinder emerging from the gaseous smoke of the rockets and rushing like a bullet into the sky. Then his cylinder would have faded away into the blue and the crowds would leave for home and forget.

But he remained, here in the ship—for ten, for twenty years.

Yes, he remained, but when would the vibration stop? The shuddering of the walls and floor about him was awful to endure; he and the experts had not counted on this problem. Tremors wrenched through his aching head. What if they didn't cease, if they endured through the entire voyage? How long could he keep from going mad?

He could think. Clayton lay on his bunk and remembered—reviewed every tiny detail of his life from birth to the present. And soon he had exhausted all memory in a pitifully short time. Then he felt the horrible throbbing all about him.

"I can exercise," he said aloud, and paced the floor; six steps forward, six back. And he tired of that. Sighing, Clayton went to the food-stores in the cabinet and downed his capsules. "I can't even spend any time eating," he wryly observed. "A swallow and it's over."

The throbbing erased the grin from his face. It was maddening. He lay down once more in the lurching bunk; switched on oxygen in the close air. He would sleep, then; sleep if this damned thrumming would permit. He endured the horrid clanking that groaned all through the silence; switching off the lights. His thoughts turned to his strange position; a prisoner in Space. Outside the burning planets wheeled, and stars whizzed in the inky blackness of spatial Nothingness. Here he lay safe and snug in a vibrating chamber; safe from the freezing cold. If only the awful jarring would stop!

Still, it had its compensations.

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There would be no newspapers on the voyage to torment him with accounts of man's inhumanity to man; no silly radio or television programs to annoy him. Only this cursed, omnipresent vibration . . .

Clayton slept, hurtling through Space.

It was not daylight when he awoke. There was no daylight and no night. There was simply himself and the ship in Space. And the vibration was steady, nerve-wrecking in its insistent beating against the brain. Clayton's legs trembled as he reached the cabinet and ate his pills.

Then, he sat down and began to endure. A terrific feeling of loneliness was beginning to assail him. He was so utterly detached here—cut off from everything. There was nothing to do. It was worse than being a prisoner in solitary confinement; at least they have larger cells, the sight of the sun, a breath of fresh air, and the glimpse of an occasional face.

Clayton had thought himself a misanthrope, a recluse. Now he longed for the sight of another's face. As the hours passed he got queer ideas. He wanted to see Life, in some form—he would have given a fortune for the company of even an insect in his soaring dungeon. The sound of a human voice would be heaven. He was so *alone*.

Nothing to do but endure the jerking, pace the floor, eat his pills, try to sleep. Nothing to think about. Clayton began to long for the time when his nails needed cutting; he could stretch out the task for hours.

He examined his clothes intently, stared for hours in the little mirror at his face. He memorized his body, scrutinized every article in the cabin of the *Future*.

And still he was not tired enough to sleep again.

He had a throbbing headache constantly. At length he managed to close his eyes and drift off into another slumber, broken by shocks which startled him into waking.

When finally he arose and switched on the light, together with more oxygen, he made a horrible discovery.

*He had lost his time-sense.**

"Time is relative," they had always told him. Now he realized the truth. He had nothing to measure time by—no watch, no glimpse of the sun or moon or stars, and no regular activities. How long had he been on this voyage? Try as he might, he could not remember.

Had he eaten every six hours? Or every ten? Or every twenty?

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*Einstein has taught us that everything is relative, and time most of all has this peculiarity. We tell time by relative means, comparing the motion of one body in relation to another. In our case, the revolution of the earth on its axis, and around the sun provides us with a time sense. Remove this visible means of telling time, in improvised units, and its very meaning becomes unintelligible. In short, time becomes non-existent. We have nothing to compare. Thus, it was inevitable that Richard Clayton should lose his ability to tell what time it was, or even at what rate time was passing. Minutes seem hours to one who is trying mentally to compute time.—Ed.

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Had he slept once each day? Once every three or four days? How often had he walked the floor?

With no instruments to place himself he was at a total loss. He ate his pills in a bemused fashion, trying to think above the shuddering which filled his senses.

This was awful. If he lost track of Time he might soon lose consciousness of identity himself. He would go mad here in the space-ship as it plunged through the void to planets beyond. Alone, tormented in a tiny cell, he had to cling to something. What was Time?

He no longer wanted to think about it. He no longer wanted to think about anything. He had to forget the world he left, or memory would drive him frantic.

"I'm afraid," he whispered. "Afraid of being alone in the darkness. I may have passed the moon. I may be a million miles away from Earth by now—or ten million."

Then Clayton realized that he was talking to himself. That way was madness. But he couldn't stop, any more than he could stop the horrible jarring vibration all around him.

"I'm afraid," he whispered in a voice that sounded hollow in the tiny humming room. "I'm afraid. *What time is it?*"

He fell asleep, still whispering, and Time rushed on.

Clayton awoke with fresh courage. He had lost his grip, he reasoned. Outside pressure, however equalized, had affected his nerves. The oxygen might have made him giddy, and the pill diet was bad. But now the weakness had passed. He smiled, walked the floor.

Then the thoughts came again. What day was it? How many weeks since he had started? Maybe it was months already; a year, two years. Eeverything of Earth seemed far away; almost part of a dream. He now felt closer to Mars than to Earth; he began to anticipate now instead of looking back.

For a while everything had been mechanical. He switched light on and off when needed, ate pills by habit, paced the floor without thinking, unconsciously tended the air system, slept without knowing when or why.

Richard Clayton gradually forgot about his body and the surroundings. The lurching buzz in his brain became a part of him; an aching part which told that he was whizzing through Space in a silver bullet. But it meant nothing more, for Clayton no longer talked to himself. He forgot himself and dreamed only of Mars ahead. Every throb of the vessel hummed "Mars—Mars—Mars."

A wonderful thing happened. He landed. The ship nosed down, trembling. It eased gently onto the grassy sward of the red planet. For a long time Clayton had felt the pull of alien gravity, knew that automatic adjustments of his vessel were dimin-

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ishing the atomic discharges and using the natural gravitational pull of Mars itself.

Now the ship landed, and Clayton had opened the door. He broke the seals and stepped out. He bounded lightly to the purple grass. His body felt free, buoyant. There was fresh air, and the sunlight seemed stronger, more intense, although clouds veiled the glowing globe.

Far away stood the forests, the green forests with the purple growth on the lushly-rearing trees. Clayton left the ship and approached the cool grove. The first tree had boughs that bent to the ground in two limbs.

Limbs—limbs they were! Two green arms reached out. Clawing branches grasped him and lifted him upward. Cold coils, slimy as a serpent's, held him tightly as he was pressed against the dark tree-trunk. And now he was staring into the purple growths set in the leaves.

The purple growths were—*heads*.

Evil, purple faces stared at him with rotting eyes like dead toadstools. Each face was wrinkled like a purple cauliflower, but beneath the pulpy mass was a great mouth. Every purple face had a purple mouth and each purple mouth opened to drip blood. Now the tree-arms pressed him closer to the cold, writhing trunk, and one of the purple faces—a woman's face—was moving up to kiss him.

The kiss of a vampire! Blood shone scarlet on the moving sensuous lips that bore down on his own. He struggled, but the limbs held him fast and the kiss came, cold as death. The icy flame of it seared through his being and his sense drowned.

Then Clayton awoke and knew it was a dream. His body was bathed with moisture. It made him aware of his body. He tottered to the mirror.

A single glance sent him reeling back in horror. Was this too a part of his dream?

Gazing into the mirror, Clayton saw reflected the face of an aging man. The features were heavily bearded, and they were lined and wrinkled, the once puffy cheeks were sunken. The eyes were the worst—Clayton did not recognize his own eyes any more. Red and deep-set in bony sockets, they burned out in a wild stare of horror. He touched his face, saw the blue-veined hand rise in the mirror and run through graying hair.

Partial Time-sense returned. He had been here for years. Years! He was growing old!

Of course the unnatural life would age him more rapidly, but still a great interval must have passed. Clayton knew that he must soon reach the end of his journey. He wanted to reach it before he had any more dreams. From now on, sanity and physical reserve must battle against the unseen enemy of Time. He staggered back to his bunk, as trembling like a metallic flying monster, the *Future* rush[illegible]

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in the blackness of interstellar Space.

They were hammering outside the vessel now; their iron arms were breaking the door. The black metal monsters lumbered in with iron tread. Their stern, steel-cut faces were expressionless as they grasped Clayton on either side and pulled him out. Across the iron platform they dragged him, walking stiffly with clicking feet that clanged against the metal. The great steel shafts rose in silvery spires all about, and into the iron tower they took him. Up the stairs—clang, clang, clang pounded the great metal feet.

And the iron stairs wound round endlessly; yet still they toiled. Their faces were set, and iron does not sweat. They never tired, though Clayton was a panting wreck ere they reached the dome and threw him before the Presence in the tower room. The metallic voice buzzed, mechanically, like a broken phonograph record.

"We - found - him - in - a - bird - oh - Master."

"He - is - made - of - soft - ness."

"He - is - alive - in - some - strange - way."

"An - an - i - mal."

And then the booming voice from the center of the tower floor.

"*I hunger.*"

Rising on an iron throne from the floor, the Master. Just a great iron trap, with steel jaws like those on a steam-shovel. The jaws clicked open, and the horrid teeth gleamed. A voice came from the depths.

"*Feed me.*"

They threw Clayton forward in iron arms, and he fell into the trap-jaws of the monster. The jaws closed, champing with relish on human flesh . . .

Clayton woke screaming. The mirror gleamed as his trembling hands found the light-switch. He stared into the face of an aging man with almost white hair. Clayton was growing old. And he wondered if his brain would hold out.

Eat pills, walk cabin, listen to the throbbing, put on air, lie on bunk. That was all, now. And the rest—waiting. Waiting, in a humming torture-chamber, for hours, days, years, centuries, untold eons.

In every eon, a dream. He landed on Mars and the ghosts came coiling out of a gray fog. They were shapes in the fog, like slimy ectoplasm, and he saw through them. But they coiled and came, and their voices were faint whispers in his soul.

"Here is Life," they whispered. "We whose souls have crossed the Void in death have waited for Life to feast on. Let us take our feasting now."

And they smothered him under gray blankets, and sucked with gray, prickling mouths at his blood. . . .

Again he landed on the planet and there was nothing. Absolute-

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ly nothing. The ground was bare and it stretched off into horizons of nothingness. There was no sky nor sun, merely the ground; endless in all directions.

He set foot on it, cautiously. He sank down into nothingness. The nothingness was throbbing now, like the ship throbbed, and it was engulfing him. He was falling into a deep pit without sides, and the oblivion closed all about him . . .

Clayton dreamed this one standing up. He opened his eyes before the mirror. His legs were weak and he steadied himself with hands that shook with age. He looked at the face in the glass—the face of a man of seventy.

"God!" he muttered. It was his own voice—the first sound he had heard in how long? How many years? For how long had he heard nothing above the hellish vibrations of this ship? How far had the *Future* gone? He was old already.

A horrid thought bit into his brain. Perhaps something had gone wrong. Maybe the calculations were at fault and he was moving into Space too slowly. He might never reach Mars. Then again—and it was a dreadful possibility—he had passed Mars, missed the carefully charted orbit of the planet. Now he was plumping on into empty voids beyond.

He swallowed his pills and lay down in the bunk. He felt a little calmer now; he had to be. For the first time in ages he remembered Earth.

Suppose it had been destroyed? Invaded by war or pestilence or disease while he was gone? Or meteors had struck it, some dying star had flamed death upon it from maddened heavens. Ghastly notions assailed him—what if Invaders crossed Space to conquer Earth, just as he now crossed to Mars?

But no sense in worrying about *that*. The problem was reaching his own goal. Helpless, he had to wait; maintain life and sanity long enough to achieve his aims. In the vibrating horror of his cell, Clayton took a mighty resolve with all his waning strength. He *would* live, and when he landed he would see Mars. Whether or not he died on the long voyage home, he would exist only until his goal was reached. He would fight against dreams from this moment on. No means of telling Time—only a long daze, and the humming of this infernal space-ship. But he'd live.

There were voices coming now, from outside the ship. Ghosts howled in the dark depths of Space. Visions of monsters and dreams of torment came, and Clayton repulsed them all. Every hour or day or year—he no longer knew which—Clayton managed to stagger to the mirror. And always it showed that he was aging rapidly. His snow-white hair and wrinkled countenance hinted at incredible senility. But Clayton lived. He was too old to think any longer, and

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too weary. He merely lived in the droning of the ship.

At first he didn't realize. He was lying on his bunk and his rheumy eyes were closed in stupor. Suddenly he became aware that the lurching had stopped. Clayton knew he must be dreaming again. He drew himself up painfully, rubbed his eyes. No—the *Future* was still. It had *landed!*

He was trembling uncontrollably. Years of vibration had done this; years of isolation with only his crazed thoughts for company. He could scarcely stand.

But this was the moment. This was what he had waited for for ten long years. No, it must have been many more years. But he could see Mars. He had made it —done the impossible!

It was an inspiring thought. But somehow, Richard Clayton would have given it all up if he could only have learned what time it was, and heard it from a human voice.

He staggered to the door—the long-sealed door. There was a lever here.

His aged heart pumped with excitement as he pulled the lever upward. The door opened—sunlight crept through—air rushed in—the light made him blink and the air wheezed in his lungs —his feet were moving into the blazing light—

Clayton fell forward into the arms of Jerry Chase.

Clayton didn't know it was Jerry Chase. He didn't know anything any longer. It had been too much.

Chase was staring down at the feeble body in his arms.

"Where's Mr. Clayton?" he murmured. "Who are you?" He stared at the aged, wrinkled face.

"Why—it's Clayton!" he breathed. "Mr. Clayton, what's wrong, sir? The atomic discharges failed when you started the ship, and all that happened was that they kept blasting. The ship never left the earth, but the violence of the discharges kept us from reaching you until now. We couldn't get to the *Future* until they stopped. Just a little while ago the ship finished shuddering, but we've been watching night and day. What happened to you, sir?"

The faded blue eyes of Richard Clayton opened. His mouth twitched as he faintly whispered.

"I—I lost track of Time. How —how long was I in the *Future?*"

Jerry Chase's face was grave as he stared again at the old man and answered, softly.

"*Just one week.*"

And as Richard Clayton's eyes glazed in death, the long voyage ended.

THE END

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THE ETERNAL WALL

By RAYMOND Z. GALLUN

A scream of brakes, the splash into icy waters, a long descent into alkaline depths . . . it was death. But Ned Vince lived again—a million years later!

"SEE you in half an hour, Betty," said Ned Vince over the party telephone. "We'll be out at the Silver Basket before ten-thirty. . . ."

Ned Vince was eager for the company of the girl he loved. That was why he was in a hurry to get to the neighboring town of Hurley, where she lived. His old car rattled and roared as he swung it recklessly around Pit Bend.

There was where Death tapped him on the shoulder. Another car leaped suddenly into view, its lights glaring blindingly past a high, upjutting mass of Jurassic rock at the turn of the road.

Dazzled, and befuddled by his

An incredible science, millior

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of years old, lay in the minds of these creatures.

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own rash speed, Ned Vince had only swift young reflexes to rely on to avoid a fearful, telescoping collision. He flicked his wheel smoothly to the right; but the County Highway Commission hadn't yet tarred the traffic-loosened gravel at the Bend.

Ned could scarcely have chosen a worse place to start sliding and spinning. His car hit the white-painted wooden rail sideways, crashed through, tumbled down a steep slope, struck a huge boulder, bounced up a little, and arced outward, falling as gracefully as a swan-diver toward the inky waters of the Pit, fifty feet beneath. . . .

Ned Vince was still dimly conscious when that black, quiet pool gysered around him in a mighty splash. He had only a dazing welt on his forehead, and a gag of terror in his throat.

Movement was slower now, as he began to sink, trapped inside his wrecked car. Nothing that he could imagine could mean doom more certainly than this. The Pit was a tremendously deep pocket in the ground, spring-fed. The edges of that almost bottomless pool were caked with a rim of white—for the water, on which dead birds so often floated, was surcharged with alkali. As that heavy, natronous liquid rushed up through the openings and cracks beneath his feet, Ned Vince knew that his friends and his family would never see his body again, lost beyond recovery in this abyss.

The car was deeply submerged. The light had blinked out on the dash-panel, leaving Ned in absolute darkness. A flood rushed in at the shattered window. He clawed at the door, trying to open it, but it was jammed in the crash-bent frame, and he couldn't fight against the force of that incoming water. The welt, left by the blow he had received on his forehead, put a thickening mist over his brain, so that he could not think clearly. Presently, when he could no longer hold his breath, bitter liquid was sucked into his lungs.

His last thoughts were those of a drowning man. The machine-shop he and his dad had had in Harwich. Betty Moore, with the smiling Irish eyes—like in the song. Betty and he had planned to go to the State University this Fall. They'd planned to be married sometime. . . . Goodbye, Betty . . .

The ripples that had ruffled the surface waters in the Pit, quieted again to glassy smoothness. The eternal stars shone calmly. The geologic Dakota hills, which might have seen the dinosaurs, still bulked along the highway. Time, the Brother of Death, and the Father of Change, seemed to wait. . . .

"Kaalleee! Tik! . . . Tik, tik, tik! . . . Kaalleee! . . ."

The excited cry, which no human throat could quite have duplicated accurately, arose thinly from the depths of a powder-dry gulch, water-scarred from an inconceivable antiquity. The noon-

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day Sun was red and huge. The air was tenuous, dehydrated, chill.

"Kaalleee! . . . Tik, tik, tik! . . ."

At first there was only one voice uttering those weird, triumphant sounds. Then other vocal organs took up that trilling wail, and those short, sharp chuckles of eagerness. Other questioning, wondering notes mixed with the cadence. Lacking qualities identifiable as human, the disturbance was still like the babble of a group of workmen who have discovered something remarkable.

The desolate expanse around the gulch, was all but without motion. The icy breeze tore tiny puffs of dust from grotesque, angling drifts of soil, nearly waterless for eons. Patches of drab lichen grew here and there on the up-jutting rocks, but in the desert itself, no other life was visible. Even the hills had sagged away, flattened by incalculable ages of erosion.

At a mile distance, a crumbling heap of rubble arose. Once it had been a building. A gigantic, jagged mass of detritus slanted upward from its crest—red debris that had once been steel. A launching catapult for the last space ships built by the gods in exodus, perhaps it was—half a million years ago. Man was gone from the Earth. Glacial ages, war, decadence, disease, and a final scattering of those ultimate superhumans to newer worlds in other solar systems, had done that.

"Kaalleee! . . . Tik, tik, tik! . . ." The sounds were not human. They were more like the chatter and wail of small desert animals.

But there was a seeming paradox here in the depths of that gulch, too. The glint of metal, sharp and burnished. The flat, streamlined bulk of a flying machine, shiny and new. The bell-like muzzle of a strange excavator-apparatus, which seemed to depend on a blast of atoms to clear away rock and soil. Thus the gulch had been cleared of the accumulated rubbish of antiquity. Man, it seemed, had a successor, as ruler of the Earth.

Loy Chuk had flown his geological expedition out from the far lowlands to the east, out from the city of Kar-Rah. And he was very happy now—flushed with a vast and unlooked-for success.

He crouched there on his haunches, at the dry bottom of the Pit. The breeze rumpled his long, brown fur. He wasn't very different in appearance from his ancestors. A foot tall, perhaps, as he squatted there in that antique stance of his kind. His tail was short and furred, his undersides creamy. White whiskers spread around his inquisitive, pink-tipped snout.

But his cranium bulged up and forward between shrewd, beady eyes, betraying the slow heritage of time, of survival of the fittest, of evolution. He could think and dream and invent, ...d the civil-

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ization of his kind was already far beyond that of the ancient Twentieth Century.

Loy Chuk and his fellow workers were gathered, tense and gleeful, around the things their digging had exposed to the daylight. There was a gob of junk—scarcely more than an irregular formation of flaky rust. But imbedded in it was a huddled form, brown and hard as old wood. The dry mud that had encased it like an airtight coffin, had by now been chipped away by the tiny investigators; but soiled clothing still clung to it, after perhaps a million years. Metal had gone into decay—yes. But not this body. The answer to this was simple—alkali. A mineral saturation that had held time and change in stasis. A perfect preservative for organic tissue, aided probably during most of those passing eras by desert dryness. The Dakotas had turned arid very swiftly. This body was not a mere fossil. It was a mummy.

"Kaalleee!" Man, that meant. Not the star-conquering demigods, but the ancestral stock that had built the first machines on Earth, and in the early Twenty-first Century, the first interplanetary rockets. No wonder Loy Chuk and his coworkers were happy in their paleontological enthusiasm! A strange accident, happening in a legendary antiquity, had aided them in their quest for knowledge.

At last Loy Chuk gave a soft, chirping signal. The chant of triumph ended, while instruments flicked in his tiny hands. The final instrument he used to test the mummy, looked like a miniature stereoscope, with complicated details. He held it over his eyes. On the tiny screen within, through the agency of focused X-rays, he saw magnified images of the internal organs of this ancient human corpse.

What his probing gaze revealed to him, made his pleasure even greater than before. In twittering, chattering sounds, he communicated his further knowledge to his henchmen. Though devoid of moisture, the mummy was perfectly preserved, even to its brain cells! Medical and biological sciences were far advanced among Loy Chuk's kind. Perhaps, by the application of principles long known to them, this long-dead body could be made to live again! It might move, speak, remember its past! What a marvelous subject for study it would make, back there in the museums of Kar-Rah!

"Tik, tik, tik! . . ."

But Loy silenced this fresh, eager chattering with a command. Work was always more substantial than cheering.

With infinite care—small, sharp hand-tools were used, now—the mummy of Ned Vince was disengaged from the worthless rust of his primitive automobile. With infinite care it was crated

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in a metal case, and hauled into the flying machine.

Flashing flame, the latter arose, bearing the entire hundred members of the expedition. The craft shot eastward at bullet-like speed. The spreading continental plateau of North America seemed to crawl backward, beneath. A tremendous, sand desert, marked with low, washed-down mountains, and the vague, a n g u l a r, geometric mounds of human cities that were gone forever.

Beyond the eastern rim of the continent, the plain dipped downward steeply. The white of dried salt was on the hills, but there was a *little green growth here*, too. The dead sea-bottom of the vanished Atlantic was not as dead as the highlands.

Far out in a deep valley, Kar-Rah, the city of the rodents, came into view—a crystalline maze of low, bubble-like structures, glinting in the red sunshine. But this was only its surface aspect. Loy Chuk's people had built their homes mostly underground, since the beginning of their foggy evolution. Besides, in this latter day, the nights were very cold, the shelter of subterranean passages and rooms was welcome.

The mummy was taken to Loy Chuk's laboratory, a short distance below the surface. Here at once, the scientist began his work. The body of the ancient man was put in a large vat. Fluids submerged it, slowly soaking from that hardened flesh the alkali that had preserved it for so long. The fluid was changed often, until woody muscles and other tissues became pliable once more.

Then the more delicate processes began. Still submerged in liquid, the corpse was submitted to a flow of restorative energy, passing between complicated electrodes. The cells of antique flesh and brain gradually took on a chemical composition nearer to that of the life that they had once known.

At last the final liquid was drained away, and the mummy lay there, a mummy no more, but a pale, silent figure in its tatters of clothing. Loy Chuk put an odd, metal-fabric helmet on its head, and a second, much smaller helmet on his own. Connected with this arrangement, was a black box of many uses. For hours he worked with his apparatus, studying, and guiding the recording instruments. The time passed swiftly.

At last, eager and ready for whatever might happen now, Loy Chuk pushed another switch. With a cold, rosy flare, energy blazed around that moveless form.

For Ned Vince, timeless eternity ended like a gradual fading mist. When he could see clearly again, he experienced that inevitable shock of vast change around him. Though it had been dehydrated, his brain had been kept perfectly intact through the ages, and now it was restored.

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So his memories were as vivid as yesterday.

Yet, through that crystalline vat in which he lay, he could see a broad, low room, in which he could barely have stood erect. He saw instruments and equipment whose weird shapes suggested alienness, and knowledge beyond the era he had known! The walls were lavender and phosphorescent. Fossil bone-fragments were mounted in shallow cases. Dinosaur bones, some of them seemed, from their size. But there was a complete skeleton of a dog, too, and the skeleton of a man, and a second man-skeleton that was not quite human. Its neck-vertebrae were very thick and solid, its shoulders were wide, and its skull was gigantic.

All this weirdness had a violent effect on Ned Vince—a sudden, nostalgic panic. Something was fearfully wrong!

The nervous terror of the unknown was on him. Feeble and dizzy after his weird resurrection, which he could not understand, remembering as he did that moment of sinking to certain death in the pool at Pit Bend, he caught the edge of the transparent vat, and pulled himself to a sitting posture. There was a muffled murmur around him, as of some vast, un-Earthly metropolis.

"Take it easy, Ned Vince. . . ."

The words themselves, and the way they were assembled, were old, familiar friends. But the tone was wrong. It was high, shrill, parrot-like, and mechanical. Ned's gaze searched for the source of the voice—located the black box just outside of his crystal vat. From that box the voice seemed to have originated. Before it crouched a small, brownish animal with a bulging head. The animal's tiny-fingered paws—hands they were, really—were touching rows of keys.

To Ned Vince, it was all utterly insane and incomprehensible. A rodent, looking like a prairie-dog, a little; but plainly possessing a high order of intelligence. And a voice whose soothingly familiar words were more repugnant somehow, simply because they could never belong in a place as eerie as this.

Ned Vince did not know how Loy Chuk had probed his brain, with the aid of a pair of helmets, and the black box apparatus. He did not know that in the latter, his language, taken from his own revitalized mind, was recorded, and that Loy Chuk had only to press certain buttons to make the instrument express his thoughts in common, long-dead English. Loy, whose vocal organs were not human, would have had great difficulty speaking English words, anyway.

Ned's dark hair was wildly awry. His gaunt, young face held befuddled terror. He gasped in the thin atmosphere. "I've gone nuts," he pronounced with a curious calm. "Stark—starin' —nuts. . . ."

Loy's box, with its recorded English words and its sonic de-

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tectors, could translate for its master, too. As the man spoke, Loy read the illuminated symbols in his own language, flashed on a frosted crystal plate before him. Thus he knew what Ned Vince was saying.

Loy Chuk pressed more keys, and the box reproduced his answer: "No, Ned, not nuts. Not a bit of it! There are just a lot of things that you've got to get used to, that's all. You drowned about a million years ago. I discovered your body. I brought you back to life. We have science that can do that. I'm Loy Chuk. . . ."

It took only a moment for the box to tell the full story in clear, bold, friendly terms. Thus Loy sought, with calm, human logic, to make his charge feel at home. Probably, though, he was a fool, to suppose that he could succeed, thus.

Vince started to mutter, struggling desperately to reason it out. "A prairie dog," he said. "Speaking to me. One million years. Evolution. The scientists say that people grew up from fishes in the sea. Prairie dogs are smart. So maybe super-prairie-dogs could come from them. A lot easier than men from fish. . . ."

It was all sound logic. Even Ned Vince knew that. Still, his mind, tuned to ordinary, simple things, couldn't quite realize all the vast things that had happened to himself, and to the world. The scope of it all was too staggeringly big. One million years. God! . . .

Ned Vince made a last effort to control himself. His knuckles tightened on the edge of the vat. "I don't know what you've been talking about," he grated wildly. "But I want to get out of here! I want to go back where I came from! Do you understand—whoever, or whatever you are?"

Loy Chuk pressed more keys. "But you can't go back to the Twentieth Century," said the box. "Nor is there any better place for you to be now, than Kar-Rah. You are the only man left on Earth. Those men that exist in other star systems are not really your kind anymore, though their forefathers originated on this planet. They have gone far beyond you in evolution. To them you would be only a senseless curiosity. You are much better off with my people—our minds are much more like yours. We will take care of you, and make you comfortable. . . ."

But Ned Vince wasn't listening, now. "You are the only man left on Earth." That had been enough for him to hear. He didn't more than half believe it. His mind was too confused for conviction about anything. Everything he saw and felt and heard might be some kind of nightmare. But then it might all be real instead, and that was abysmal horror. Ned was no coward—death and danger of any ordinary Earthly kind, he could have faced bravely. But the loneliness here, and the utter

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strangeness, were hideous like being stranded alone on another world!

His heart was pounding heavily, and his eyes were wide. He looked across this eerie room. There was a ramp there at the other side, leading upward instead of a stairway. Fierce impulse to escape this nameless lair, to try to learn the facts for himself, possessed him. He bounded out of the vat, and with head down, dashed for the ramp.

He had to go most of the way on his hands and knees, for the upslanting passage was low. Excited animal chucklings around him, and the occasional touch of a furry body, hurried his feverish scrambling. But he emerged at last at the surface.

He stood there panting in that frigid, rarefied air. It was night. The Moon was a gigantic, pock-marked bulk. The constellations were unrecognizable. The rodent city was a glowing expanse of shallow, crystalline domes, set among odd, scrub trees and bushes. The crags loomed on all sides, all their jaggedness lost after a million years of erosion under an ocean that was gone. In that ghastly moonlight, the ground glistened with dry salt.

"Well, I guess it's all true, huh?" Ned Vince muttered in a flat tone.

Behind him he heard an excited, squeaky chattering. Rodents in pursuit. Looking back, he saw the pinpoint gleams of countless little eyes. Yes, he might as well be an exile on another planet—so changed had the Earth become.

A wave of intolerable homesickness came over him as he sensed the distances of time that had passed—those inconceivable eons, separating himself from his friends, from Betty, from almost everything that was familiar. He started to run, away from those glittering rodent eyes. He sensed death in that cold sea-bottom, but what of it? What reason did he have left to live? He'd be only a museum piece here, a thing to be caged and studied. . . .

Prison or a madhouse would be far better. He tried to get hold of his courage. But what was there to inspire it? Nothing! He laughed harshly as he ran, welcoming that bitter, killing cold. Nostalgia had him in its clutch, and there was no answer in his hell-world, lost beyond the barrier of the years. . . .

Loy Chuk and his followers presently came upon Ned Vince's unconscious form, a mile from the city of Kar-Rah. In a flying machine they took him back, and applied stimulants. He came to, in the same laboratory room as before. But he was firmly strapped to a low platform this time, so that he could not escape again. There he lay, helpless, until presently an idea occurred to him. It gave him a few crumbs of hope.

"Hey, somebody!" he called.

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"You'd better get some rest, Ned Vince," came the answer from the black box. It was Loy Chuk speaking again.

"But listen!" Ned protested. "You know a lot more than we did in the Twentieth Century. And—well—there's that thing called time-travel, that I used to read about. Maybe you know how to make it work! Maybe you could send me back to my own time after all!"

Little Loy Chuk was in a black, discouraged mood, himself. He could understand the utter, sick dejection of this giant from the past, lost from his own kind. Probably insanity looming. In far less extreme circumstances than this, death from homesickness had come.

Loy Chuk was a scientist. In common with all real scientists, regardless of the species from which they spring, he loved the subjects of his researches. He wanted this ancient man to live and to be happy. Or this creature would be of scant value for study.

So Loy considered carefully what Ned Vince had suggested. Time-travel. Almost a legend. An assault upon an intangible wall that had baffled far keener wits than Loy's. But he was bent, now, on the well-being of this anachronism he had so miraculously resurrected—this human, this Kaalleee. . . .

Loy jabbed buttons on the black box. "Yes, Ned Vince," said the sonic apparatus. "Time-travel. Perhaps that is the only thing to do—to send you back to your own period of history. For I see that you will never be yourself, here. It will be hard to accomplish, but we'll try. Now I shall put you under an anesthetic. . . ."

Ned felt better immediately, for there was real hope now, where there had been none before. Maybe he'd be back in his home-town of Harwich again. Maybe he'd see the old machine-shop, there. And the trees greening out in Spring. Maybe he'd be seeing Betty Moore in Hurley, soon. . . . Ned relaxed, as a tiny hypo-needle bit into his arm. . . .

As soon as Ned Vince passed into unconsciousness, Loy Chuk went to work once more, using that pair of brain-helmets again, exploring carefully the man's mind. After hours of research, he proceeded to prepare his plans. The government of Kar-Rah was a scientific oligarchy, of which Loy was a prime member. It would be easy to get the help he needed.

A horde of small, grey-furred beings and their machines, toiled for many days.

Ned Vince's mind swam gradually out of the blur that had enveloped it. He was wandering aimlessly about in a familiar room. The girders of the roof above were of red-painted steel. His tool-benches were there, greasy and littered with metal filings, just as they had always been. He had a tractor to

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repair, and a seed-drill. Outside of the machine-shop, the old, familiar yellow sun was shining. Across the street was the small brown house, where he lived.

With a sudden startlement, he saw Betty Moore in the doorway. She wore a blue dress, and a mischievous smile curved her lips. As though she had succeeded in creeping up on him, for a surprise.

"Why, Ned." she chuckled. "You look as though you've been dreaming, and just woke up!"

He grimaced ruefully as she approached. With a kind of fierce gratitude, he took her in his arms. Yes, she was just like always.

"I guess I *was* dreaming, Betty," he whispered, feeling that mighty sense of relief. "I must have fallen asleep at the bench, here, and had a nightmare. I thought I had an accident at Pit Band—and that a lot of worse things happened. . . . But it wasn't true . . ."

Ned Vince's mind, over which there was still an elusive fog that he did not try to shake off, accepted apparent facts simply.

He did not know anything about the invisible radiations beating down upon him, soothing and dimming his brain, so that it would never question or doubt, or observe too closely the incongruous circumstances that must often appear. The lack of traffic in the street without, for instance—and the lack of people besides himself and Betty.

He didn't know that this machine-shop was built from his own memories of the original. He didn't know that this Betty was of the same origin—a miraculous fabrication of metal and energy-units and soft plastic. The trees outside were only lantern-slide illusions.

It was all built inside a great, opaque dome. But there were hidden television systems, too. Thus Loy Chuk's kind could study this ancient man— this Kaalleee. Thus, their motives were mostly selfish.

Loy, though, was not observing, now. He had wandered far out into cold, sad sea-bottom, to ponder. He squeaked and chatted to himself, contemplating the magnificent, inexorable march of the ages. He remembered the ancient ruins, left by the final supermen.

"The Kaalleee believes himself home," Loy was thinking. "He will survive and be happy. But there was no other way. Time is an Eternal Wall. Our archeological researches among the cities of the supermen show the truth. Even they, who once ruled Earth, never escaped from the present by so much as an instant. . . ."

THE END

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 (*Concluded from page* 15)

They were part of the way up the slopes of what had been Duckbill Mountain—at the very point to be exact, where the top had been sheered off; and Wilde put his hand down upon the perfect flatness that cut through both soil and rock.

"*What* a Disinto," he said. "It took the mountain right off its base."

"What made him build it?"

Wilde shrugged, "I just don't know. Some factor in his environment—there is no way of knowing what—reacted upon his Moon-type positronic brain to produce a Disinto out of junk. It's a million to one against our ever stumbling upon that factor again now that the robot himself has forgotten. We'll never have that Disinto."

"Never mind. The important thing is that we have the robot."

"The hell you say." There was poignant regret in his voice. "Have you ever had anything to do with the Disintos on the Moon? They eat up energy like so many electronic hogs and won't even begin to run till you've built up a potential of better than a million volts. —But *this* Disinto worked differently. I went through the rubbish with a microscope, and would you like to see the only source of power of any kind that I found?"

"What was it?"

"Just this!—And we'll never know how he did it."

And Justin Wilde held up the source of power that had enabled a Disinto to chew up a mountain in half a second—*two flashlight batteries!*

THE END

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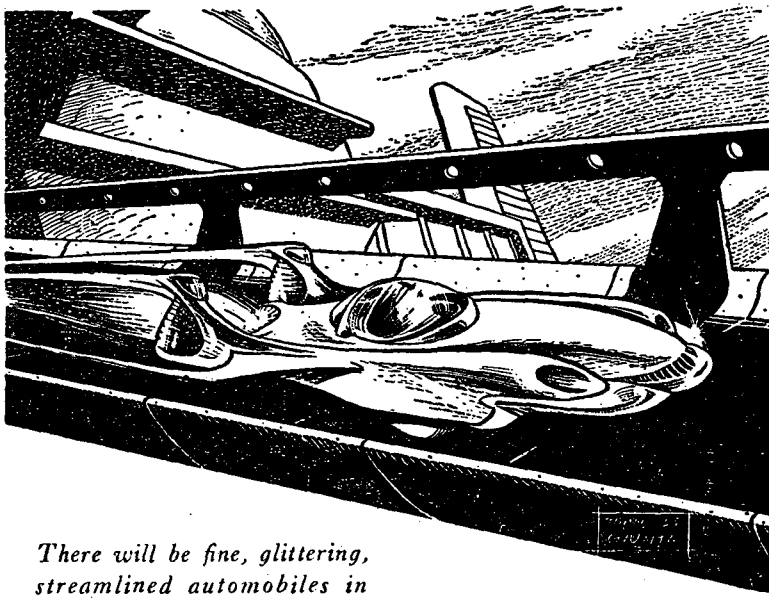

There will be fine, glittering, streamlined automobiles in 2000 A.D. Possibly they will run themselves while the driver sits back with an old-fashioned in his hands. Perhaps they will carry folks down the highways at ninety miles an hour in perfect safety. But picking up a hitch-hiker will still be as dangerous as it is today.

HARD GUY

By H. B. CARLETON

HE WAS standing at the side of the glassite super-highway, his arm half-raised, thumb pointed in the same direction as that of the approaching rocket car. Ordinarily Frederick Marden would have passed a hitch-hiker without stopping, but there was something in the bearing and appearance of this one that caused him to apply his brakes.

Marden opened the door next to the vacant seat beside him.

"Going my way?" he asked.

A pair of steady, unsmiling blue eyes looked him over. "Yeah."

"All right, then. Hop in."

The hitch-hiker took his time. He slid into the seat with casual

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deliberateness and slammed the car door shut. The rocket car got under way once more.

They rode in silence for half a mile or so. Finally Marden glanced questioningly at his companion's expressionless profile.

"Where are you headed for?" he asked.

"Dentonville." He spoke from the corner of his mouth, without turning his head.

"Oh, yes. That's the next town, isn't it?"

"Yeah."

Not very communicative, reflected Marden, noticing the rather ragged condition of the other's celo-lex clothing.

"Have much trouble getting rides?"

The passenger turned his head, his blue eyes without emotion.

"Yeah. Most guys are leery about pickin' up hitch-hikers. Scared they'll get robbed."

Marden pursed his lips, nodded.

"Something to that, all right. I'm usually pretty careful myself; but I figured you looked okay."

"Can't always tell by looks," was the calm reply. " 'Course us guys mostly pick out some guy with a swell atomic-mobile if we're goin' to pull a stick-up. When we see a old heap like this one there's usually not enough dough to make it pay."

Marden felt his jaw drop.

"Say, you sound like you go in for that sort of thing! I'm telling you right now, I haven't enough cash on me to make it worth your while. I'm just a salesman, trying to get along."

"You got nothin' to worry about," his passenger assured him. "Stick-ups ain't my racket."

An audible sigh of relief escaped Marden.

"I'm certainly glad to hear that! What is your—er—racket, anyway?"

The blue eyes frosted over.

"Look, chum, sometimes it ain't exactly healthy to ask questions like that."

"Pardon me," Marden said hastily. "I didn't mean anything. It's none of my business, of course."

The calm eyes flicked over his contrite expression.

"Skip it, pal. You look like a right guy. I'll put you next to somethin'. Only keep your lip buttoned, see?"

"Oh, absolutely."

"I'm Mike Eagen—head of the Strato Rovers."

"No!" Marden was plainly awed. "The Strato Rovers, eh? I've heard of them, all right."

The other nodded complacently.

"Yeah. We're about the toughest mob this side of Mars. We don't bother honest people, though. We get ours from the crooks and racketeers. They can't squeal to the Interplanetary Police."

"There's a lot in what you say," agreed Marden. "And of course that puts your . . . mob in the Robin Hood class."

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"Robin Hood—nuts! That guy was a dope! Runnin' around with bows and arrows. Why, we got a mystery ray that paralyzes anybody that starts up with us. They're all right when it wears off, but by that time we get away."

Marden was properly impressed.

"A mystery ray! With a weapon like that, you should be able to walk into a bank and clean it out without any trouble."

His passenger's lips curled.

"I told you, we don't bother honest people. We even help the S.P. sometimes. Right now we're workin' with the Earth-Mars G-men in roundin' up a gang of fifth-columnists that are plannin' on takin' over the gov'ment. They're led by the Black Hornet. This Black Hornet goes around pretendin' like he's a big business man, but he's really a internatural spy."

"A—what?"

"A internatural spy," repeated Marden's companion, shortly. "The E-M G-men say he's the most dangerous man in the country. But he won't last long with the Strato Rovers on his trail."

Marden nodded.

"I can believe that. Tell me, Eagen, what are you doing out here around a small Earth town like Dentonville?"

"The gov'ment's buildin' some kind of a ammunition place near here, and I understand the Black Hornet's figurin' on wreckin' everything. 'Course he won't get away with it."

Scattered plasticade houses on either side of the road indicated they had reached the outskirts of Dentonville. Mike Eagen pointed ahead to a small white house set back among a cluster of trees.

"There's where I'm holed up. Drop me off in front."

A young woman in a faded blue satin-glass house-dress was standing at the gate of the white picket fence. She watched in silence as the passenger stepped from the rocket car and lifted his hand to the driver in careless farewell.

"Thanks for the lift, chum," said Mike Eagen.

"Not at all," replied Marden. "Glad to have been of service to Mike Eagen."

The woman smiled to him.

"He's told you his name, I see."

Marden lifted his hat.

"Indeed he has."

"Michael is all right," she said. "I do think, though, that he reads too many Buck Gordon Interplanetary comic books for a boy of eleven."

THE END

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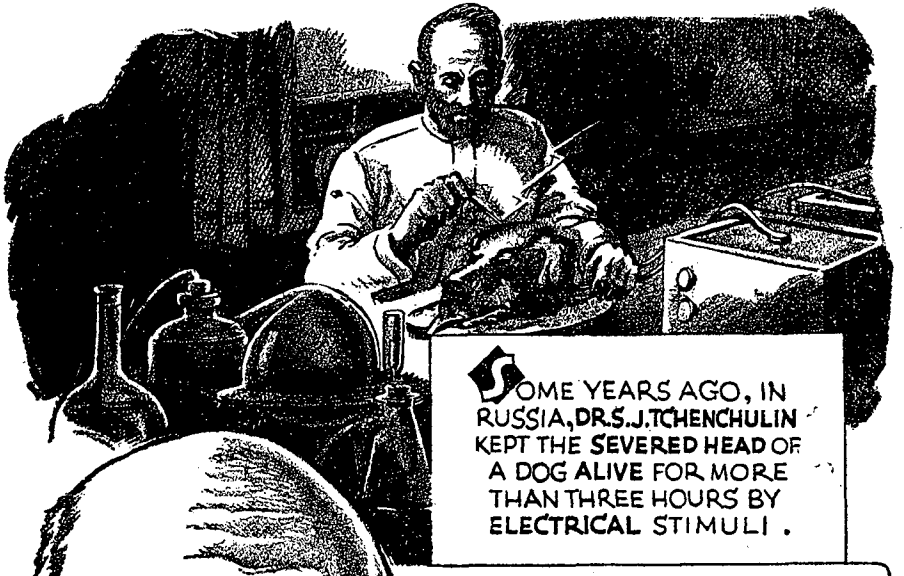

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WILL MAN SOMEDAY CREATE LIFE BY MEANS OF HUGE ELECTRICAL GENERATORS ACTING ON PROTOPLASMIC AMOEBAS?

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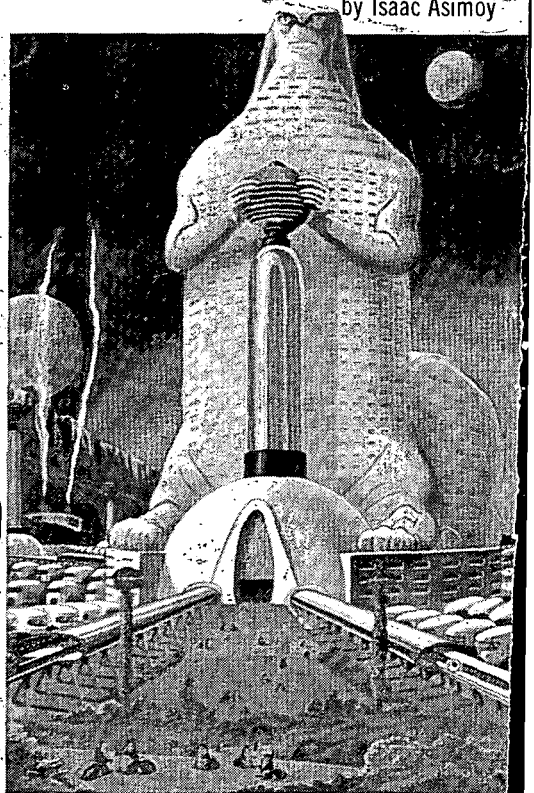

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